M. McCall
28 Park Circus
Ayr.

G E Clive
14 Newmarket St

"THE RIGHT HONOURABLE"

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"THE RIGHT HONOURABLE"

A ROMANCE OF SOCIETY AND POLITICS

By JUSTIN McCARTHY, M.P.

AND

MRS. CAMPBELL-PRAED

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The Authors of this book have made their experiment in what they believe to be a genuine way. "The Right Honourable" is in the strictest sense the work of a man and a woman. Every character, incident, scene, and page is joint work, and was thought out and written out in combination. Whatever the book is, it is not patchwork.

The Authors only wish to add that the politics and the personages of the story are purely fanciful. Their aim was to surround figures that do not exist and political parties hitherto unformed with conditions of reality which might make them seem as if they too were real.

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"THE RIGHT HONOURABLE."

CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE QUEEN.

A GREY morning off the coast of Australia; a wide grey upheaving sea; a grey sky which melted into the waves; clouds, and foamy splashes blending together on the horizon line, except where the dawn was breaking. There, in the east, a faint pink glow, which seemed to widen the vast lonely Pacific and to make it even wider, vaster, and more desolate.

Westward lay the grey shore, lonely and desolate too, and hazy with mist; only a promontory that jutted out into the sea almost in a line with the rising sun, showing clearly—a bold bleak headland, below it long stretches of sand dotted with bristling black rocks, and on the highest point, a lighthouse, a flagstaff, two or three rough cottages, and clusters of wind-beaten bread-fruit trees.

A steamer bound southward had slackened speed. The Captain was standing on deck with his telescope pointed towards the Cape; and three or four men near him were watching through their glasses the launching of a pilot-boat which had been drawn up on the sand below the cliffs. One of these cried out with eager interest—

"There's a woman being put off. They are carrying her on board the boat."

"No, it's a child," said another of the passengers; "a little girl."

"Sure, it's Kooràli," exclaimed a third.

The speaker was the Attorney-General of the colony—South Britain—and was usually known as Judge O'Beirne. He was old; he was coarse; his face was reddened by overmuch whiskey, perhaps; but there was a note of tenderness in his voice as he added, half to himself, "Isn't it me own little Queen Kooràli coming out to see the world!"

Just as the boat put off from shore and became a speck upon the sea, a man stepped up from below and advanced towards the group on deck. He asked two questions rapidly, yet with a sort of deliberation and a pause between the two.

"What are we stopping for? Who is Kooràli?"

His keen glance shot from the men before him to the Cape—to the

boat. There was an air of something like command in his walk, in his look, in the tone of his voice, the way in which he waited for an answer. This man was Mr. Sandham Morse. He was an Englishman. He was about thirty-five years of age, tall, strongly built, and with a curiously Napoleonic outline of face. He had even that sallow, olive complexion which we see in the portraits of the Bonaparte family, and which, though common enough in the climate from which the Napoleons came, is rare indeed among Englishmen. His features, being Napoleonic, were naturally statuesque. His lips, firmly set together, had an expression of power in them which still further carried out the Napoleonic likeness. When the eyelids were lowered, the face had a look of gravity or of melancholy which sometimes even darkened for a moment into a semblance of sullenness; but when the deep grey soft and bright eyes were seen, then the look changed into something peculiarly warm, winning, and, if the word might be used, welcoming.

Sandham Morse had been Premier of South Britain. A few months ago he had resigned the leadership of the House, and he was now on his way home to England.

South Britain was aggrieved at his desertion. It was, however, generally understood that Sandham Morse aimed at higher political distinction than can be achieved in a crude Australian colony. His career so far, considering his limited opportunities, had been decidedly brilliant, if somewhat eccentric. He was of good English family, an only son, left quite alone in the world, with a small independent fortune. He had a passion for seeing the world and mixing in the affairs of men. When the American civil war was going on and Englishmen of the better class, as it is oddly called, were enthusiastic for the South, Morse, then not quite of age and fresh from the university, went out and became a volunteer in the service of the North. He sought service not under some great commander, and in some distinguished regiment, but with Wentworth Higginson in his experimental battalion of negroes; and he did well there. When the war was over, he threw himself into American politics so eagerly that every one thought he was going to settle in the States. He became the friend of Charles Sumner, and Wendell Phillips, and Horace Greeley. He made many a speech in Cooper Institute, New York, and in Faneuil Hall, Boston. After having studied American affairs enough to satisfy his inclination, he set off for China and Japan and returned to England. He did not remain at home long; for he began to be anxious to learn something about our colonial systems, and an opportunity came in his way. A friend of his dead father was appointed Governor of South Britain, and Morse went out in the new Governor's train. He entered the colonial Parliament, speedily gained a reputation for eloquence and statesmanship, led, curiously enough, the democratic party, and held office for several years. He entertained pronounced political opinions, and had strong secret ambitions. Perhaps only he himself knew what these were and why the Australian stage did not content him any more than the American

had done. His determination to quit Australia had been suddenly announced. He had taken no one into his confidence. It was said that he had come into a fortune. It was rumoured that a certain English lady of rank was answerable in the first instance for his exile, and in the second for his return. It was whispered that he had strange, almost revolutionary, views about English government and English social systems, and that he meant to fight for a cause. Anyhow, while professing the deepest interest in the great Australian questions, Morse clearly gave out that his farewell would be final. The colonists foretold great success for him in England, "He'll get on," they said; "like Bob Lowe—like Childers."

The Captain putting down his telescope, replied to the first clause of Morse's inquiry.

"What are we stopping for, Mr. Morse? Why, they've signalled us from the Cape. Middlemist's run lies back there, and some of his people are wanting to be put off. They always hail a steamer from the Cape. It's shorter than travelling round to the township."

Morse's dark face lighted. "Middlemist!" he said. "The Premier?"

"The same that is wearing your cast-off shoes," put in Judge O'Beirne; "and my Little Queen is his daughter."

Morse took up the telescope and surveyed the Cape, the flagstaff, the lighthouse, finally the boat, which was coming close to the steamer, and in the stern of which a rough-bearded squatter and a very slender very young girl were seated. Four men in pilots' caps rowed the boat, and the bow was heaped up with saddle-bags and curious-looking parcels of luggage. Morse felt interested. Middlemist was head of the squatting party and of the Ministry which had succeeded his own. He had heard that his opponent owned a station on the coast, but had never known its exact whereabouts. Seaboard stations are not considered worth talking about in Australia, and Middlemist lived chiefly in town, and depended rather upon what his grateful country bestowed upon him than upon his private resources. He was a big, burly, self-made man; not the kind of person whose daughter would be called "the Little Queen," or, indeed, who would be likely to have a daughter who could be so styled, except in derision, and there was no derisive tone in O'Beirne's voice. The whole connection of ideas seemed incongruous to Morse, and the very incongruity interested him.

"I didn't know Middlemist had a daughter. And what makes you call her 'the Little Queen'?"

Judge O'Beirne laughed—his mellow county Kerry laugh. "Faith, I can't tell you. It's just a nickname she has come by from the half-dozen or so of us that have stopped at Muttabarra and watched her growing up. I think it is because of a way the child has of looking you straight in the face with her big eyes, and of seeming to expect that the world is to be just as she likes it, so that there isn't a boy that 'ud have the heart to contradict her. Isn't that the way, Captain?"

"I can't answer you there, Judge," said the Captain, "for I have never sighted the young lady till this morning, and she is not close enough yet for me to make out what her eyes are like."

Judge O'Beirne laughed again, but this time rather in a perfunctory way, like one who is reflecting. "Yes, she has got a way with her—that's it. And I'd bet my silver-topped waddy that not a soul has ever spoken a cross word to her in her life. Middlemist has always kept her at Muttabarra, and he has had the best governesses for her that could be got in Sydney—South Britain articles wouldn't do for her; and gave her aunt, Mrs. Campbell—it's Jack Campbell, Middlemist's brother-in-law, that is superintendent at Muttabarra—he gave Mrs. Campbell strict orders that she wasn't to mix up with the station hands or the township people. There's something queer about the notion," continued the Judge after a short pause, "for Middlemist never branded more than two hundred calves in the year, and we all know that doesn't run to champagne and swell governesses; and his son in the Lands' Office is about as hulking a fellow as you could see out of the Never-Never country."

"What is the secret of it, then?" asked Morse, stepping back from the bulwarks, and leaning with arms folded against the hatchway.

"Well, you know Middlemist began as a sheep-shearer, and he married Poll Watkins, who was barmaid at the Royal when I first came to the colony," said the Judge. "But Poll went off the hooks, and Middlemist went in for tin-mining and made a fortune, and then got smashed up. Before his smash came, though, he married a little English governess, who was a real lady if ever there was one. She died too, and Middlemist started on politics and gave Jack Campbell, *her* brother, a billet to superintend Muttabarra. So Campbell's wife looked after Kooràli; and the Little Queen has had her Sydney governesses, and has learned French and the piano, and has had a horse kept stabled for her summer and winter, and never a bad word spoken in her presence. And now she is seventeen, and Middlemist has come into his kingdom and is at the head of the colony, and likely to stop there till you come back again, Morse. So our little queen is coming out of her enchanted forest into the world, to dance at the Governor's balls, and attend the opening of Parliament, and be shown to her place, just below the daïs, by the Usher of the Black Rod, and learn to flirt, and be made love to, and get married, and all the rest of it."

There was something quaint and pathetic in the picture.

"Poor Little Queen!" Morse murmured involuntarily.

"I don't know why you should say that," exclaimed the Judge. "Every one will make a fuss about her. She will be a pet among us; a sort of child of the Executive—a daughter of the regiment. There isn't another grown-up daughter in the Ministry; and I've already got my eye on a husband for her."

"Who is he?" asked Morse carelessly.

"I'll give a guess," cried an outsider, who had been listening attentively to the conversation. "Crichton Kenway, of course. The

Admirable Crichton! Postmaster-General; chief of red-tapists! Good-looking chap! An immaculate young man! Don't you think so, Morse?"

"No," returned Morse shortly. "I shouldn't call him an immaculate young man."

As if unwilling to carry on the discussion, he moved to the other side of the deck, where he stood silently watching the rising sun, till the regular dip of oars and sound of voices on the water told him that the pilot-boat was approaching. Even then he held back from the excited group which gathered at the bulwarks, looking down as the companion-ladder was lowered; and he heard with no show of curiosity the interchange of greetings, the Judge's rough kindly voice, and the clear girlish tones that floated up in reply from below.

"Well, my Little Queen, and it is you that are dropping down upon us in the middle of the sea! A bareheaded waif, indeed! A queen without a crown, faith!"

"Yes; I've lost my hat, Judge. Barril knocked it off with his oar, and we couldn't stop to pick it up. But that's no matter, is it? I'll ask the stewardess to lend me one. And—oh, do tell me—Parliament hasn't met yet? Shall I be in time? We have been waiting at the pilot station four days for a steamer to go by."

"Oh, you're in time, Queen; in time to mount your throne, in time to break hearts, in time for everything."

"Passengers first, then luggage," called out the Captain, as the pilots began to pitch the saddlebags on deck. "Are you coming down with us, Mr. Campbell?" he asked the unkempt-looking squatter in a cabbage-tree hat, who appeared at the gangway and saluted the Judge.

"No, Captain. I don't take my spree in town till the session is over. I shall put Miss Middlemist in your charge, and in yours, Judge. You don't go up the river to the company's wharf, do you, Captain?"

"I'm bound straight for Sydney, Mr. Campbell, to catch the English mail."

"Then I'll telegraph to the chief to arrange about picking up Miss Middlemist in the Bay," said the squatter.

"No need for that, Mr. Campbell. Here's our ex-premier aboard—on his way home, more's the pity,—and all the Ministers will be coming down in the Government steam tug as far as the river bar to see him off and wish him good luck."

Morse came forward at this reference to himself, and a kind of greeting passed between him and the new-comer.

"The new king attending the funeral of his predecessor. That's about it, I suppose," he said, with a smile which, while it lasted, made his face so winning. But his remark was hardly noticed, and that in itself was a curious experience to Sandham Morse. Everybody was occupied with the boat, where Kooràli, with one foot on the companion-ladder, was saying her farewells to the pilots. And in her manner there was a certain gracious ease and friendly dignity which

amused Morse as he listened. He could almost fancy that she held out her little hand to be kissed respectfully by her vassals.

Her uncle, swinging himself down, called out, "Come, Kooràli, the Captain wants to get up steam again." And the Captain said apologetically, "I have got to think of the tide, and of crossing the Mary River bar, miss, or I wouldn't hurry you."

"Good-bye, Barril," said the girl's sweet clear voice. "Good-bye, Dick and Nealy. Good-bye, all of you. And I'll send you a telegram every now and then, Barril, just to tell you how I like everything. And when I have got the pearl you gave me set, I'll wear it always. And good-bye, good-bye."

A moment more, and she stood upon the little platform by the steamer's side, supporting herself with one hand upon the rope railing, as the vessel made a movement—a childlike figure in a soft, clinging woollen frock of grey, which the wind blew close to her form, bareheaded, clearly outlined against the grey sky and the grey sea, and with the tender light of the dawning sun shining full upon her face.

It was thus that Morse first saw her; and it was this picture of her which for long afterwards came to him unconsciously whenever his mind dwelt on things lovely and sweet and unstained. He thought of her as of something belonging to the day-dawn, as symbolic of the hope, the poetry, the ideal joy which overhangs but never quite touches actual life; and perhaps it was because of this vague suggestion of unfulfilled promise and of yearning not to be realized, that the picture always brought with it a feeling of exquisite sadness.

Kooràli was a slender, wild-falcon creature, at once shy and queenly, with a sweet, small, pale face, and red, quiver-shaped, sensitive lips; with a small, erectly-set head, and a broad brow shadowed by dark brown hair that did not lie heavy, but grew thick and soft and close, and with dark deep eyes, dreamy yet fearless, which gazed straight afar, as it were, beyond sea and sky, and had a light in them like the light of dawn.

The girl stepped on deck, taking the Captain's outstretched hand for a moment, then greeting Judge O'Beirne, and sending swift, shy, searching glances towards the men whom she did not know. Her eyes met those of Morse. Instinctively, he raised his hat and made her a salutation. Kooràli returned it with a gesture full of unstudied grace, and turning impulsively to the Judge, seemed about to ask a question. But the last saddlebag had been flung on deck, and there was a little commotion in the boat as the pilots dipped their oars. She hung over the bulwarks to say some parting words to her uncle; the companion-ladder was raised; the screw revolved; very soon the boat had again become a black speck upon the water, and the steamer was speeding southward.

The sun was now well above the horizon, and the shore's misty outlines were growing into distinctness. A keen breeze swept over the waves and tossed up foam. The air was fresh and exhilarating. Never had fuller promise been given of a glorious day. And, indeed,

nothing more beautiful in its way could be imagined than the wild, strange scene—the lonely coast, with its weird-looking clumps of bread-fruit trees, its sandy bays, its rocky points, and tiers of blue-green gum foliage stretching back to a distant range of mountains, the wide expanse of ocean, rose-flushed, with that white line afar to the east, showing where the Great Barrier Reef keeps guard against the Pacific.

Kooràli seated herself upon a bench, the Judge beside her; and now she asked the question which had been on her lips a little while before.

"Who is that on the other side of the deck? He looks like the pictures of Napoleon as he stands with his arms folded. Is it Mr. Morse?"

"What made you guess right, Kooràli? Yes, it's Morse."

"I have heard you describe him," answered the girl. "You never said, though, that he was like Napoleon. He puts me in mind of a picture in my French history at home, where Napoleon is standing thinking—just so. He is thinking of his future, perhaps; of his battles, of his victories, of France, and of the people he loved so well; and I think he has a foreboding, too, of defeat and exile and loneliness, for his eyes are sad. Mr. Morse is like that, somehow."

Kooràli's tone had in it a touch of enthusiasm. The Judge laughed more softly than was usual with him.

"Faith, then, there *is* something of the Napoleon about Sandham Morse. He makes people believe in him. The sort of man, with his queer democratic notions, that would suit our navvies and free selectors for a republican president, if we were come to that in Australia."

"Oh, I wish we could," said Kooràli. "I should like Australia to be a republic. I should like my country to be free—really free!"

"There's a traitor for you!" exclaimed the Judge. "Listen to her, just! And her father a constitutional minister! Come over here, Morse. You should be introduced all in proper form to Middlemist's daughter—a red republican, like yourself."

Morse, who had indeed heard part of the conversation, came forward, and the introduction was made. Kooràli gave him her hand. She did not think him so like a tragic hero now when he smiled. But to him, in spite of her youth, her brightness and almost childish air of inconsequence, she still brought a suggestion of pathos as she lifted her eyes to his without speaking. The joke about red republicanism dropped, and none of the usual commonplaces occurred to him, so he was silent. The Judge went on—

"And how about the Motherland—the Old Country, and the Queen, you rebel? And the divine right of kings, and all the rest of it?"

Kooràli gave her bare head a serious little shake.

"We are new. They are old," she said.

"And you don't care about what is old?" asked Morse, with a tone of regret.

"Care!" Kooràli's eyes gave out a soft gleam. "Oh yes. It's

everything. It's history, poetry, tradition. But *we* are going to make all that. The people always make it. We will choose our own Napoleon."

She coloured a little, remembering the comparison she had drawn. The Judge laughed.

"You can't choose this one. He's a deserter. He won't fight under the flag of his adopted country. The New World doesn't suit him. He has tried America. He has had a go at Australia, and now he is turning back after all to his own old crumbling traditions."

A clatter in the saloon caught the Judge's attention. He peered down the skylight. The steward was serving out coffee.

"You thief of the world!" cried the Judge, addressing one of the juniors who had looked up from the table with something brandished in his hand. "Let go my eggs, will you? and don't interfere with my own brew. I take my coffee with a *stick* in it," added he, turning to Kooràli, "that's the yolk of an egg and the least drop of whisky. And if they can put me off with a stale egg they just will, the young devils. My Little Queen, now—and ye don't deserve to be called it—come and try my coffee and my *stick*."

But Kooràli declined, and so also did Morse. Almost everybody else went down below. The cabin was filled with talk and laughter. Only those two remained on deck.

They talked of the scenery, of the chances of smooth weather—commonplaces.

"I am going to find you a more comfortable seat," said Morse, after a while. "And then I shall order some coffee up here."

He led the way towards the stern of the vessel where, near the helm, there was a little space covered over with a rough awning and built in on one side with huge coils of rope. He drew forward a chair for her, and then left her for a few minutes. When he came back he was followed by a steward carrying coffee and rolls.

She was gazing dreamily at the vanishing lighthouse, and started when he spoke to her.

"Oh, thank you." She drank some coffee, but presently put down the cup and did not touch the roll.

"Aren't you hungry?" asked Morse. "You must have got up very early. Or did the pilots give you breakfast before they brought you on board?"

"I was awake at four," she answered. "Barril, the head pilot, knocked at my door to tell me that there was a steamer off the Cape. He got breakfast ready, and we all had it together. It was quite a sad meal."

"The pilots were sorry to lose you, I suppose?"

"Yes, very sorry," she replied gravely; "and I was sorry, too."

"You have known them a long time?"

"I have grown up among them, and they have always done everything they could to please me," she said, with her little unconscious air of dignity. "They used to bring me jam and apples and oranges,

whenever a ship passed from New South Wales or Tasmania; and I have a necklace made from the mother-of-pearl in the nautilus shells they got for me, and such a beautiful real pearl which Barril found himself, and which I shall wear always. It was Barril who carried me on shore when the steamer first dropped us at Muttabarra—I was only three years old then. And I have never gone away since, till to-day."

"And to-day they have had to bid good-bye to their Little Queen. I don't wonder that they were sad. But you must feel that you are going to take possession of a kingdom instead of leaving one. Isn't this the case?"

"It was your kingdom a little while ago," said Kooràli, looking at him with a sort of innocent wonder in her eyes.

He could not help smiling. To the child this was quite a serious matter. That was evident. Her father was, she knew, chief minister of the country. He had taken Morse's place. She believed him to be more powerful than the Governor. She wondered that any one could have resigned so splendid a position. As for herself, she was going down to reign by this monarch's side. Perhaps she fancied that she might help to sway the destinies of Australia. It was very childlike and yet very natural, and only a more brilliant continuation of what had gone before. Probably she had always had a voice in everything—in affairs at the lighthouse as well as on her father's station. The pilots had worshipped her, of course, and every one had bowed down before her; and perhaps she fancied that the heads of departments, and the Government officials, and the members of Parliament, and all the rest, would also acknowledge her supremacy. Poor Little Queen!

CHAPTER II.

OUTLINED AGAINST THE GREY SKY.

Falling in with the fancy, Morse said, "I shall think of you when I am far away, and be glad that you are in my place."

A curious thought came into his mind: "After all, why am I leaving the place?" Aloud he only said, "I hope you will like your crown. But crowns in our day are not crowns of roses." Then he thought he was talking sentimentality, not to say nonsense.

"If I were really a queen," Kooràli said quite seriously and earnestly, "I shouldn't care about a crown. I should only care for my people. My kingdom should be in their hearts. But that can't be, I suppose, in this prosaic world, or the time for it is past."

Morse did not answer at once. He was gazing thoughtfully out to sea.

"I am afraid the spirit is dead; but the form remains," he said dreamily, "like one of your 'ringed' gum-trees. Perhaps monarchy is one of the ringed gum-trees already," he added, turning to her with his bright smile, in which there was something enigmatical.

"So I don't think I would have any more crowns," continued Kooràli. "That was what I was thinking of when I said that I should like to see Australia a republic. There are not any real heart-kings and queens now, are there? And strong young countries ought not to care about names and forms."

Her childlike earnestness and eagerness amused and also touched him. Heart-king! Heart-queen! He echoed the fanciful phrase. It clung to him.

"You are longing to get to your kingdom—or republic?" he asked.

"Oh yes," she replied gravely. "I am longing to see the world, and the great struggles of ambition and public life."

The world—the great struggles of ambition and public life—in a second-class Australian colony which he was leaving because he found it insufferably narrow, because it was stifling him with its narrowness! He was curiously touched.

"Why are you going away?" she suddenly asked in a tone of wonder and pity, as if in leaving that place he must be leaving all.

"I am going to see my world, and to begin my great struggle of ambition and my public life—in London."

"Is London your only world?"

"I think so."

She did not speak. She appeared to be reflecting. Evidently his words had opened out dim vistas. Just then a bell clanged. It was disturbing, and Morse knew that another—the signal for breakfast—would soon ring also. People had begun to come upon deck. Among them were several ladies. These eyed Kooràli with frank curiosity. She suddenly became conscious of their interest, and seemed to remember the loss of her hat, for she involuntarily raised her hand to her bare head, then got up, and, with her air of easy self-possession, brought the little *tête-à-tête* to a close.

"I think I had better go down and try to find something to put on. I don't see Judge O'Beirne. Would you please ask the Captain to have my pack taken to the ladies' cabin?"

She made her peremptory little demand with great sweetness. Morse conducted her to the hatchway, and then gave instructions about the curious-looking canvas bags which he supposed contained the young lady's wardrobe. He smiled to himself as he watched a sailor remove them from the deck. He was a little sorry the conversation had ended so abruptly, and wondered if it would be renewed during the twenty-four hours they were to pass together on board the steamer. He had ascertained that they would reach Moreton Bay early on the following morning. There, according to the official programme, the Ministers would come on board from the Government steamboat; there would be a breakfast, and his (Morse's) health would be drunk in bumpers of champagne. There would be as much speechifying as the tide and the state of the river bar would permit. Then the farewells would be said. Kooràli, under her father's escort, would be transferred to the little steamer. She would find her world some forty

miles up the river in the petty colonial capital he had left for ever; while he would speed on his way to that other world—the world of politics, of wealth, of fashion, of poverty, misery, ruin; the world of contrasts, the world of London; and the bright vision which had come to him with the morning's dawn would be only but as the remembrance of a dream.

It seemed that at present little in the shape of harmonious conversation was to come of the keynote which had been struck. Nothing is easier on a crowded steamer than for two people to be for hours within a few yards of each other and yet have no opportunity for the interchange of ideas. Morse saw Kooràli on the opposite side of the long breakfast-table, but he was not near enough to hear her speak. Her pretty pathetic face was framed in the wide black brim of a severely simple bonnet, which he imagined must belong to a grim stewardess, whom he had seen hanging about the entrance to the ladies' cabin. The bonnet, in spite of its plainness and its black border, had a quaint appearance, and suited the young girl's delicate expressive features, pale clear skin, and deep wistful eyes. Morse mentally applied to her adjectives which give the impression of something plaintive and sad; yet he could not be blind to a certain childish freshness and innocent confidence in her look which were at times especially noticeable and charming. It seemed to him that this extreme youthfulness and brightness of hope only deepened the suggestion of tragedy that struck him more than anything else about her. It was by this tragic touch that she seized his interest. Underlying much that was cold and practical in Morse's nature, there was a keen poetic faculty. He took life seriously, and, though he had a shrewd and ready perception of the humorous, his bent was rather to its melancholy phases.

All the morning Kooràli flitted hither and thither, inspecting the various parts of the steamer, chattering to the Captain, and asking Judge O'Beirne questions about the people she was to know and the things she was to do. However pensive her face might be, her disposition was as gay, apparently, as that of a child, and she seemed to enjoy life as heartily. She was a pretty figure as she stood on the bridge, and looked at the coast through the Captain's telescope. Morse's eyes often wandered towards her as he sat on the lower deck, but he did not go near or try to monopolize her.

He left her to the Judge and to the young barristers all the afternoon also. He had letters of importance to write—parting letters to political friends and colleagues—to political foes as well; and he had his own future to think about, and certain vague ambitious schemes to mature—schemes which, now that he had cut himself adrift from Australian life, seemed to loom more definite and distinct. He had only now begun to realize—and he had done so with a sense of shock—how vast was his ambition, how intense his determination to carve his own career after the fashion that conformed with his character and with principles and theories that were powerful enough to be motive springs.

As he sat writing and thinking, Judge O'Beirne's Irish tones and Kooràli's voice and laugh floated down to him through the half-open skylight. He could not hear what they were saying, but the image and thought of the girl blended with his more serious reflections, and gave him a strange feeling of double existence. He could not get rid of the fancy that he was standing on the verge of two lives, and that the hour of choice and crisis had come. For the first time he questioned, in a fugitive way, the wisdom of beginning what he had called his great struggle of ambition, and of plunging, as he meant to do, into the very current of life. He wondered vaguely within himself whether after all it would not have been better to remain in Australia—to give his energies and talents to the fostering of a new, strong, yet unfledged country, and to leave ruined institutions and corrupt social systems to dwindle into decay. He was alone at the upper end of the saloon, and his mood suffered no interruption from the other passengers, who, seeing him occupied with documents and correspondence, respected his statesmanlike attitude. He shook himself free at last of the dreamy consciousness of Kooràli's influence, and his pen dashed off vigorously, never resting till dinner time. It was not for some time after that meal, and when the claims of whist and hot toddy called the Judge below, that he again found himself near Kooràli. She was left by Judge O'Beirne tucked up under a rug in a deck chair placed in that sheltered corner to which Morse had brought her in the morning. She had taken off her bonnet, and a white woollen shawl was wrapped round her shoulders, and partially covered her head. She looked very soft and sweet, and there was a radiance on her face not of the dawn now, but of the setting sun. She was not talking to any one—there was no one near, but her thoughts seemed almost as animated as her conversation, for she was smiling to herself, and her features were lighted up with bright interest and a sort of eager anticipation. He guessed what she was thinking. The steamer was speeding smoothly along. A few more hours and life would have become dramatic.

It seemed quite natural for him to come near and remark, smiling as he spoke, "You haven't much longer to wait now. You will soon be seeing the world."

"Oh!" She gave a little start, and looked at him questioningly, as though she were not quite sure if he meant to be serious. But she did not put her doubt into words, as for an instant he feared, and he felt a swift pang at the notion of having damped her girlish enthusiasm.

"Only till to-morrow," she replied simply. "I have been thinking how lovely it will all be. I think it is so delightful to look forward and picture things. Don't you?"

He seated himself. "I don't want to be depressing; but I suppose most people would tell you that picturing things beforehand is the best part of it."

"Not to me. Everything turns out to be better than I fancy it. And everything that I want to happen comes to pass."

"You are a fortunate girl," said Morse. "Perhaps, however, it is because your wishes are not very extravagant."

Kooràli laughed softly. "A few of my wishes are very extravagant. They belong to a fairy tale, and are such a long way off that I only dream of their being fulfilled some time. Like going to heaven or my ideal republic. Seeing London is one of them."

"You will go there some day. Every one goes to London."

"Ah, some day!" she repeated, with a pretty movement of her hands. "*I* shall be there within six weeks; and I shall expect to meet you there some time within six years. At the most, that is not such a long way off. Then I shall remind you of our little voyage together, and I shall ask you if all your wishes, even the most extravagant ones, have been so literally fulfilled."

"Yes; and I shall ask you——" she began impulsively, and paused.

"What shall you ask me? I promise to answer your questions, whatever they may be."

She shrank a little as if in shyness, but did not lower her eyes, which met his.

"I think you want to do something great. You have a look on your face—like that—as if you had a star to follow, or there were an Austerlitz before you. I should like to ask you when we meet in London if you had done what you wanted."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "I will answer that beforehand. No. Who among ordinary men does anything great? Who succeeds? Or if success comes to the exceptional man for a time, how long does it last? If there is an Austerlitz, doesn't there come a Waterloo at the end? But perhaps it is worth trying even for defeat. And, as you say very prettily, one must follow his star."

There was a short silence. Presently Kooràli said, "I shouldn't like to feel like that. I couldn't look forward to disappointment. I don't believe in disappointment, or in not being happy. I have always been happy. I mean always to be happy, and to make people glad."

"I think you will do that last thing," he answered, "though you may not be able to help causing unhappiness, too. But," he added, seeing that she turned quickly, and looked a little surprised, "it is quite evident that your views of life are justified by experience, since everything you ever wished to happen has come to pass."

Kooràli turned to him again with a little eager uplifting of her chin. "I did so want to leave the Bush when I was grown up. I wanted to be at the heart of things—to know what the people who lived in cities did and felt and thought. It was my dream. And now, you see how soon it has all come to me."

"It would have come in the natural order of things, wouldn't it?" he asked.

"Oh! a long time hence. You see, father wouldn't have been rich enough to take a house in the town, and give me all the things I wanted unless he had got an appointment. And he would not have accepted, nor should I have liked him to have, any but the first place.

You had the first place," she added simply, "and no one could have supposed that you would give it up of your free will."

"So," he said, "you owe to me the realisation of one of your dreams at least. It's a little hard that I shouldn't see you enjoying it. Tell me," he said abruptly, after a moment's pause, "how did you come by your wild, strange name?—Kooràli," he lingered softly on the syllables. "I never heard it before."

"It's a native name. Kooral is the blacks' word for snakes. I was called after a place on the station where I was born—near Muttabarra—a station farther south, among the mountains. The reason is a sad little story. Shall I tell it to you?"

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Morse.

"There's a deep ravine down there," said Kooràli. "It's called the Kooral Gully, because of the snakes. Aunt Janet says. I don't suppose there were really more snakes there than anywhere else. Anyhow, my mother and father had to camp in it once, with my little brother—my own, only brother, and his nurse let him get bitten by a death adder. He just lived an hour or two. My mother drove home with him in her arms dead. Soon afterwards I was born, and my mother died. When they asked her what she wished my name to be, she said Kooràli."

Morse uttered an exclamation of interest and pity. It seemed to him fitting, somehow, that there should be this tragic association with her name. He was deeply touched. Kooràli's voice had taken a more plaintive intonation as she told the little tale.

"So you never knew your mother?" he said. "And you lived among the mountains, a poor little lonely child?"

"Oh no!" she answered. "I was not lonely. Aunt Janet took care of me. Everybody has always been good to me. We went away. Father could not bear the old station. He didn't like the Bush any longer. He has never been much at Muttabarra."

Morse would have liked to know something of the mental relationship between the father and daughter. He could not connect the idea of sentiment, refinement of feeling, or intellectual sympathy with his impression of the shrewd, somewhat coarse, self-interested, rather Jewish-looking man who was now at the head of affairs. He could not imagine Mr. Middlemist the guide and friend of such a girl as Kooràli. But he asked no directly leading question. After all, what did it matter to him? So he only said—

"Your story is very sad and very interesting. I don't know why I should think of you as having had an isolated childhood, or, if it were the case, why I should pity you. It is a good preparation for the inevitable loneliness of life."

She looked at him straightly, with almost mournful interest

"Are you lonely?" she asked.

"I am quite alone," he answered. "That is, I have no one in the world near enough and dear enough to talk to quite freely."

"Perhaps," she said slowly, "when you are in England you will meet with some one whom you can trust."

"Yes," he said—slowly, too. "It is quite likely that I may meet with such a one—in England. Some one to trust," he went on, dreamily, "some one to share one's soul with; some one whose sympathy would bring a sense of measureless content." He recalled himself with a slight gesture and a little laugh. In truth, he suddenly found himself wondering how he, who was usually so reticent, could speak thus to a girl whom he had met but a few hours before. "Odd fancies!" he said, "but a man has them; and women, too, I suppose, for that matter. They'll come to you some day, Little Queen. Forgive me. You see I have caught Judge O'Beirne's phrase."

Kooràli had withdrawn her eyes lingeringly from his face while he spoke. She did not seem to notice his apology.

"I don't think one is ever quite alone," she said in a thoughtful way. "We are not alone in dreams; and sometimes it seems to me that life is like a dream, and that there is a world quite close to us full of beautiful, bodiless things—fancies, and music, and poetry, and lovely visions, that would become real if only we could strain a little further, or see a little clearer, or hear a little more distinctly. I feel like that—all strange and so near, so near to fuller life, when I am all by myself in the Bush. I feel like that often——"

"And yet you want to know the life of cities, where these things are not?"

"Oh!" she said, shrinking, "I shouldn't like to think that I would lose my beautiful fancies. Don't tell me that."

"No; I will not prophesy sadness. I will only ask you when—or if—we meet in the glare and noise of a London drawing-room, whether the beautiful fancies are with you still; and if you have kept them I shall be very glad."

"Tell me something about London," she said, and began to ask him questions in her quick, impulsive way.

The night had closed in, and the wide waste of waters gleamed with phosphorescent patches. Their talk glided on from one subject to another in pleasant fitful fashion. Nothing remarkable was said, yet all seemed tinged by the witchery of the hour. To Morse there was something strangely fresh and sympathetic in Kooràli's simple remarks. He liked their poetic flavour. As a matter of fact, the companionship of very young women was not usually agreeable to him. He was a man who affected—in all pure intent—the company of married women, and he held a theory that it would be impossible for him to fall in love with any except a woman of society—highly trained, sweet of nature, noble, and true, but, all the same, one versed in the refinements and subtleties of modern civilization. Nevertheless, he liked this girl; her talk charmed him. He was touched by her crude optimism. She was so undeveloped, and at the same time, he thought, so full of capabilities. In spite of his theories, he liked her air of other-worldliness. He liked the quick way in which she seized an idea, her ready sympathy and almost tender interest. She set him thinking; and, as he paced the deck, long after she had gone below, his mind dwelt upon

her. He could fancy how she would throw herself heart and soul into the honourable ambitions of a husband she loved; how she would make his ideas her own; how complete and soothing, and yet how stimulating, would be her companionship. What a relief it would be to turn to her from the fret and struggle of public affairs—to turn from life's prose to its poetry.

Morning saw the mail boat anchored in the bay, and soon the Government tender, all decorated with flags, steamed gaily to her side. The Ministers came on board, and, after a little of that preliminary fuss and ceremonial in which the baby colony delights, the farewell banquet to Morse began.

Mr. Middlemist, foremost of the Government deputation, seemed more engrossed by his official duties than by the meeting with his daughter. It was not till after he had made a florid little address to Morse that he kissed Kooràli, bidding her welcome, and formally introducing her to his colleagues. Morse, watching her, saw a slightly pained bewildered look cross her face; but it did not stay there long. Soon she was at ease, and had apparently settled in her mind that the exigencies of a political function required that there should be as little show as possible of family affection.

Two or three of the Ministers' wives were of the party, and Kooràli took the place among them that her father evidently intended should be ceded to her. The little by-play amused Morse. He observed that the Premier glanced with dissatisfaction at the stewardess's bonnet, and that at the banquet Kooràli sat bareheaded on the right of the new Postmaster-General, Mr. Crichton Kenway.

Mr. Kenway was a young man evidently not of colonial origin. Indeed, Morse had already incidentally heard that he belonged to an impoverished English family which had once owned ancestral acres in a midland county that he himself knew. Crichton Kenway was of a type very different from that of his colleague, the Premier. Mr. Middlemist was beyond middle age, short, dark, and plebeian. He was stout, with stubby iron-grey whiskers and clean-shaven upper lip and chin. He looked like a man who took life from an eminently practical point of view, and was not free from its grosser influences. Studying his face and manner now, Morse could not reconcile them with Kooràli's sad little story of the break-up of his home, and with the idea of devoted constancy to a dead wife's memory.

Crichton Kenway, on the other hand, seemed fairly fitted to be a hero of romance of the conventional order. He was tall, upright, good-looking, well dressed, and had an air of breeding. His head could not be called intellectual, but his fair hair, parted down the middle, grew back from the temples, and his forehead thus appeared higher than it really was. He had a look of alertness also, and a rather anxiously pleasant manner, as if he wished to produce a good impression and was keenly alive to his own advantage. He had bright, rather hard blue eyes, straight features, and a fine drooping blonde moustache which, perhaps fortunately, fell over his mouth.

His chin, however, was decisively cut, somewhat pointed, and he had a long, lean throat that suggested distinction, though it sometimes gave him a sort of rapacious look, like that of a fine young bird of prey. He was young, not more than thirty, if so much, and it was a proof of ability that he should hold even a subordinate place in the new Cabinet. The position of Postmaster-General, it should perhaps be said, was not quite on a par with that of the other Ministers. Till Middlemist's accession to power the Postmaster-General had been merely the head of a department, but when the office had been conferred upon Crichton Kenway it had become ministerial, and its holder represented the Government in the upper house.

To Morse there was something dreamlike about the banquet. He could hardly realize that this was his farewell to Australia, even when, in an impressive and heartfelt speech, he returned thanks for the Premier's valedictory encomium of his policy and his personal qualities and for the enthusiastic manner in which his health had been drunk. He had an odd feeling that he was a grown-up youth leaving the school in which he had been trained, in order to begin his fight with the world. The ceremonial, the fine speeches, the bombast, the reciprocal compliments, all struck him with a dash of humour and even of scorn with which blended as well a melancholy sentiment and a tender regret. Or, he fancied, he might be an actor called from a provincial company with which he had played happily for a time, to some great London theatre. He felt himself fitted for some higher destiny; he despised the mimic sovereigns of tragedy and comedy, the stage strut, the tinsel, the petty jealousy, the self-sufficiency; the dense self-interest which smothered higher aims and abstract motives. Already he was far away from all this, and yet he was sad to leave the old life, sad to think of the Little Queen who was so contented with her sphere, and who would perhaps marry the *jeune premier* and go on playing leading lady to a provincial audience, never dreaming that she had in her the capacity of a Rachel or a Sarah Bernhardt.

At last it was over—the orations, the champagne drinking, the compliments. The Captain had made his little speech, in which he reminded the company that he was due in Sydney at a certain hour to catch the English mail boat, and that time and tide would not wait even for an ex-premier and his successor. So they all left the saloon, which somehow remained impressed upon Morse's memory—the stuffy atmosphere, the gilding, the long table heaped with tropical fruits, the scent of bananas and pineapples, the soft-footed Chinese waiters, the puffy, vulgar-looking man at the head of the table, the quaint poetic face of the young girl, and the good-looking, self-satisfied man by her side. They were on deck again, and both steamers were making ready to start—the little steamer, her flags flying, puffing spasmodically, and the big one with its screw slowly heaving. There was much hand-shaking, and there were many cheers given. The Ministers and their wives and the passengers for the capital had gone on board the tender. Kooràli, her father, and Crichton Kenway were the last.

The four stood together. Morse took Kooràli's hand in his. "Good-bye," he said, and smiled that winning smile which lit up his dark Napoleonic face. "Good-bye, Little Queen," he added in a lower voice. "I hope that you may be happy in your kingdom."

He did not add a wish that they might meet again. At that moment the thought uppermost in his mind was that he preferred to keep unspoiled in his recollection that picture of her as she stood outlined against the grey sky with the light of dawn upon her face.

CHAPTER III.

LADY BETTY MORSE.

About ten years had passed away since the parting vessels separated Morse and Kooràli. We are in London. There was a great party at the house of a London lady of high social distinction—a sort of queen of society. It was still somewhat early in the season—a season that had been specially brilliant thus far. It was a very interesting season; because soon after its opening there came the sudden collapse of a Ministry believed to be remarkably strong in the affections of the country. It would be utterly superfluous to tell the intelligent reader of the unending amount of talk which such an event supplies in circles where everybody knows somebody whose career has for the moment been blighted by the event, and some one else whose hopes have been set burning brightly. The lady at whose house this party is taking place was in the very heart of London political society; and she was the wife of one of the fallen Ministry. Moreover, she was the wife of a Minister who was generally credited with having tried to bring about the collapse. He had been riding for a fall, people said. He was supposed to have found the Cabinet not strong enough in its radicalism for his tastes; to have considered it was weak-kneed, and not fulfilling its promises to the country; and he stood apart somehow; seemed to sulk rather; and his attitude encouraged the enemies of the Government, it was argued; and these enemies were spirited on to bold and persistent endeavours. At last they succeeded in forming a temporary combination of genuine opposition and casual malcontent, and they "went for" the Ministry at a moment of peculiar crisis and carried a vote against the Government, and the Government came to an end —collapsed like a house of cards.

Lady Betty Morse was the hostess whose guests choked with their carriages and hansom cabs that part of Park Lane in which she lived. Lady Betty was the daughter of the Marquis of Germilion. She was rich; she was singularly pretty; she was still well under thirty years old, and she was the wife of Sandham Morse—"The Right Honourable Sandham Morse, M.P.," who had but lately been one of her Majesty's Secretaries of State. It was a love match altogether, society said; for Morse's politics were directly opposed to those of Lord Ger-

milion. Lady Betty and Morse had been drawn together by feelings, not politics. And when it was clear that she loved him, Lord Germilion was far too fond of his pretty daughter, his only child, to think of crossing her in her love. He accepted Morse, the Radical from the colonies, with remarkably good grace; and congratulated himself that his son-in-law was a rising man, a man of acknowledged ability; and that "he has the inestimable advantage of being a gentleman, which, by Jove, sir, can't be said for every Cabinet Minister nowadays." Lord Germilion had been heard to express his regret that, since he had no son, the succession to the title could not be settled on his son-in-law instead of his nephew.

Nothing could be prettier than Lady Betty. Her head was small and shapely, and was set with exquisite grace on her slender neck; her dark brown eyes, with a glance in them like that of a stag or a gazelle, went with kindly penetration straight to the heart of every one; her conversation sparkled as well as her eyes. She did not really say very brilliant things, but she always conveyed the idea of cleverness; and, indeed, she was decidedly clever, although not perhaps very intellectual. She and her husband were, after several years of matrimony, still very much attached to one another, though not in the Darby and Joan fashion; their position put that out of the question. Lady Betty liked society, and was made for it. She went out incessantly; and Morse's political duties naturally took up a great part of his time. Yet they saw each other at some hour in every day, and were considered a devoted couple. They had no children. Sometimes a pair are drawn more closely together because they have no children; the affections concentrate themselves.

For all that has been said in the way of dogma on the subject, it is still perhaps possible to believe that a poet may be made, although he has not been born. But the most disputatious person will not venture to gainsay the assertion that a hostess must be born, and cannot be made. No training can make a woman into a hostess. Nature must have sent her into the world preordained and specially constructed for the high position. She must be a sort of living paradox. She must be selfish enough to have a constant look-out for her own advantages and her own success; she must be unselfish enough to feel a real interest in every one who comes within the authority of her circle. She must be brimming over with ready sympathy; but the sympathy must not be too deep. She must never be distracted by the real distress of one person from the utterly unreal distresses of another. She must make her presence felt by everybody. The ordinary woman of the world, who stands at her drawing-room door and merely goes through the ceremonial of formal welcome to her guests, bears about the same relationship to a real hostess that a pump does to a fountain. A woman without a generous, kindly heart could not be a hostess; she would be always merely the unlighted lamp. But your really great women—the Sapphos, the Aspasias, the George Sands, women devoured by craving for experience, eager to drink life to the

dregs—are not fit for the commonplace part of hostess. They are too preoccupied; they would be thrown away on such a position. They are too strong, and yet not strong enough, for the place. They could not help showing that their natures needed a more powerful stimulant; and that they wanted to soar higher and to go deeper to the very heart of things.

Lady Betty Morse was a model hostess. She stood just outside the principal reception-room, facing the crowd of arrivals who thronged the stairs and landing. A curtain of heavy, faded-looking arras draping the doorway made a charming background to her slender form—very richly clad, as seemed to befit her position and the occasion, in brocaded stuff of dull Venetian red, with magnificent jewels upon the ruffled bodice and sparkling on her neck and in her dark hair. It was a fancy of Lady Betty's to dress after a somewhat matronly fashion, and in all the winning charm of her manner there was not the faintest trace of coquetry. Adulation, great people, the throbbing interest of public affairs, the life at high pressure of drawing-rooms, the ceaseless round and routine of society, came as naturally to her as to breathe. Any one could see at a glance that she liked the work of entertaining; that she enjoyed it; delighted in it. Her beautiful dark eyes sparkled with gratification as her guests grouped around her. She was wonderfully quick; she had a charming little welcome for every one. Each man got a sentence, or at least a phrase, all to himself; quite peculiar; sometimes spoken with a winning little air of confidence, as if it were something altogether between him and her with which the outer world had no concern. Men who were but new acquaintances were surprised and charmed to hear a whispered reference thus made to something they had said when they first were introduced to her, and which they assumed she had forgotten long ago. Then she liked women as well as men; and women liked her. She never flirted; but to the men whom she really liked and valued, there was a certain tenderness in her manner and her tones which they found unspeakably delightful. Her ways and her looks seemed to say to each of these, "Oh yes; I do like you very much; and you know it, of course." And she did like them in the sincerest way, and she was not in the slightest degree a hypocrite. She was a true friend to those whom she liked; and, indeed, would have proved herself a true friend to any one who stood in need of friendship and had any claim on her, who had even the mere claim on her friendship that is constituted by the need of a friend.

A little group of men had ranged themselves just within the doorway at her beck; but their homage was of a somewhat abstract kind. They did not look like men who went in for the business of flirtation—they were politicians, diplomatists, men who looked at her with fraternal admiration—not one after the pattern of reigning adorer to a fashionable beauty; not one whose manner suggested deep personal interest, unless indeed one might except a handsome youth of seventeen or thereabouts, with long curly hair and dreamy eyes, who held

her fan, took her commands, and seemed to delight in playing the part of page. "My pretty page" was indeed Lady Betty's pet name for the boy, Lenny, who was her latest whim, and who hung about her picturesquely.

It was a very charming scene. Lady Betty's house, like everything else about her, was perfect in its own way, though nothing in it seemed to flaunt merit. It was not gorgeous, nor eccentric, nor even artistic, in the accepted sense of the word. Lady Betty had no sympathy with the æsthetic movement. She did not affect the early English, the Oriental, the Japanese, the Renaissance style, or any other of the prevailing fads of fashion in the matter of furniture or decoration. There were no tawny stuffs from Liberty's; no grotesque porcelain monsters; no strange patterns of frieze or dado. But Lady Betty liked spacious rooms and an harmonious background. There was a great hall in the centre of the house, its ceiling reaching to the roof, galleries ranging its sides, and a broad oak staircase that might have been brought from some manorial castle. There was much tapestry, and there were deep-hued hangings, and a wonderful medley of rare and beautiful things, not one of which clashed with the other. All, in studio jargon, composed well; no single article was obtrusive, even in worth. Priceless china tried to hide itself in recesses, in quaint cabinets, and above carved ledges. There were pictures, not too many, and mostly landscapes, all gems. There were mirrors, reflecting back lights and people, but set so cunningly that it was difficult to believe they were mirrors. The lights were electric, soft, and clear; the frames were old Florentine. The portraits, what there were, the Germilion ancestry not insisted upon, were mellow in tone, poetic, suggestive. And yet, was Lady Betty quite poetic? Can a woman of the world distil poetry?

Every one who attended Lady Betty Morse's receptions was, to a student of men and manners, worthy of note. A representative of almost all grades of aristocratic Philistia and upper Bohemia might be found there this evening. Prospective monarchy, giving evidence of the trumpeted Guelph memory for faces in affable recognitions to right and left, and a lovely princess, who claims flowery metaphors, graceful as the lily and sweet as the heliotrope, the colours of which she was wearing to-night. Lower in the scale, the irreproachable queen of the stage whom fashion had set up in place of deposed sovereigns—more magnetic perhaps, but soul-vibrating electricity was for the moment out of date; a great statesman, crested eagle among hawks; a great soldier, many soldiers; the last thing in foreign serenities, and the newest innovation in the shape of bejewelled Maharajahs; the tragedians of Society; its licensed jesters; and the generals of the army of Art.

All such, and many more, greater or lesser, upright on their feet, some on the outer fringe turning wistful glances towards vacant chairs.

There had been a dinner party, of course, at Lady Betty's before the evening party. The dinner was given in honour of a royal prince and

princess. Lady Betty had once been a maid of honour or something of that kind; and Royalty put up with her husband's eccentric politics for her sake. The dinner party was a little slow. For one reason, not a word was said about politics; and just at that moment everybody was interested in politics. The new Administration had not been quite formed; and people were dying to know who was to have this place and who was to have that. But Lady Betty went in resolutely for bringing all sorts of politicians together; and this principle necessitated neutrality of conversation at least at dinner. There were several bitter opponents of her husband's principles present; and besides, it was understood that Royalty, just then, would rather not hear anything about politics. Enough could be said on the subject when the company went upstairs and the guests had come to the evening party, and the rooms were filled, and talking was done in groups or *tête-à-tête*.

One of the guests at the dinner-table, the new American Minister, stood now well within the circle, and made his keen and slightly humorous observations on living London.

There had been some trouble that day, as there often was before a London dinner party, in settling the order of precedence where the American Minister was concerned. More than one perplexed hostess had found herself compelled late on the afternoon of her dinner party to send in breathless haste to consult high official authority as to the place which ought to be assigned to the American Minister in a procession which included not only royal personages—their position is fixed as fate—and archbishops, and a cardinal, and a duke or two, but also the jealous ambassadors of great European powers, and several peers of yesterday's creation, sensitive to the quick about all honour due to their fire-new titles.

Mr. Paulton was a very handsome and stately man; so tall and commanding that he threw everybody, Royalty included, into a sort of insignificance. He had been a great political orator in his day. He was now falling into years—had left sixty a good way behind; but yet stood with the erectness of a tower, and could endure fatigue, even the fatigue of social pleasure, like a boy. Mr. Paulton was new to the host and hostess and to the whole affair. That is, when we say he was new to the host, he had never spoken to Morse before, but he had heard of him, and was greatly interested in him. He was also greatly interested and puzzled by the manner in which everybody addressed the illustrious princess as "ma'am." "One might have thought we we were all talking to a New England school-marm," he said to himself. He was discreet, and said nothing on the subject to any one else, and after a while found himself replying to some gracious inquiry of Royalty with the word "ma'am" on his lips. It amused him. "I am getting on in court ways," he thought. "I shall presently be denounced in some of our papers at home as a minion of Royalty and a court sycophant."

Mr. Paulton was intelligently inquisitive, like many of his countrymen, and he was very anxious to ask a few questions about men and

parties. He was glad when the dinner was over and the company had all gone upstairs and the rooms were thoroughly well filled. After he had had to submit to many formal introductions, he found himself happily near a good-looking, pale, slender young man, whose face he had observed with liking at the dinner-table, and with whom he had exchanged some agreeable words. He got into conversation with this young man, and asked him some questions, which were answered with great frankness and courtesy.

"Our host doesn't seem to be much put out by the fall of the Administration he belonged to," the American Minister ventured to say. And he glanced towards where Morse was standing.

Morse looked very stately and dignified as he entertained his guests. He had grown somewhat stouter and stronger-looking than when we saw him last; but his face was still as handsome in its peculiar way, as striking and as Napoleonic.

"I should think he is delighted," was the answer. "They say he wanted to get out of it long ago. He is an ambitious man, and he had not much of a chance there, I fancy."

"I am interested in him particularly," the American Minister said. "You know he was in the States for a while, and was making a mark there when he suddenly went back right away to England. Well, I suppose he liked his own country best."

"He didn't stay there, all the same. He went out to one of the Australian colonies, and got to be at the head of an Administration there; and then he threw up the whole affair and came back again to England. I was out in the Fiji Islands myself afterwards, and I used to hear about him."

Mr. Paulton looked keenly at his companion. "Out in the Fiji Islands!" he repeated, as if wondering what this well-appointed person had been doing in so barbarous a place. "Then you are something of an outsider in this sort of thing, like myself. I shouldn't have guessed it."

The young man smiled. His smile was pleasant, but it had in it something abstract—vaguely cynical. He did not reply at once. His eyes ranged the scene, taking in everything—from the central group, the starry nucleus, to the somewhat belated hangers-on, eagerly straining.

"I suppose any one who thinks must be an outsider at 'this sort of thing,' though he needn't be so in the ordinary sense," was his reply. "It interests me to look on at this whirl of London society, and see the poor birds rising up and beating their wings, knocking all the feathers off, some of them, and coming down very much the worse for their pains."

The American laughed. "That's so. Climbers, eh! But I should have thought most of them here to-night belonged naturally to the top."

"Oh! social distinction, place, power! It all comes to the same," returned the young man. "If people would only work the whole

thing out like an algebraical problem, the man who bothered himself to find x would learn that he had better have occupied himself with A and B, which were close at hand."

"I guess if Morse is a climber he'll stay in England this time," the American Minister said, with a peculiar gesture. "Quite the rising man, is he not?"

"Risen man, I should almost say. He must be leader of a party. It only waits for him to form a party out of the wreck and welter of things here. He seems to have got everything. He is rich, through his wife, of course, and she adores him. She is a queen of society, and every one adores her. We tell her so, and she doesn't mind; it doesn't seem to spoil her one little bit."

"He ought to be a happy man—yet he don't look like it."

"Think not? Oh yes; he is very happy. He delights in the great political game he is playing; and his wife plays the social game for him just as well, or better."

"I have got a way of looking at faces," said the American, "and I study the line of the forehead just above the eyes when a man's face is in repose; and I find it tells you a good deal. Now, there is something depressed and melancholy about this man."

The young man looked again at his host. Evidently this view of Morse's character had not occurred to him before.

"I don't know why he should be melancholy. He has got about all he wants, I should think. He says very clever and amusing things in his speeches sometimes. No; I shouldn't think he was melancholy; a man like him hasn't time to be."

"Do you think he is a sincere man?" the American asked, in his direct way. "A sincere man, or an ambitious man merely? A statesman, or a politician—if you understand how we Americans use the word politician and the sort of distinction we make."

"In that sense I should say a sincere man, certainly; I am sure he believes all he says. But I think he is ambitious, too. I really don't know him very well; we don't seem to hit it off quite. I don't think he is serious enough in his views of things." The young man was a little embarrassed now, and spoke with a winning sort of diffidence.

"No? Not serious enough, with that face?"

"No; not in my way. I think a man with his influence over the people—the people adore him, you know—could do better than form political combinations. I think he ought to go for social reform, and for trying to make our people sober and good and believers in all that is good. What England wants is moral reformation—more, much more, than political reform. Morse does not see this. I think that is one reason why we don't suit each other. I dare say it is my fault; I don't do him justice, perhaps. Every man must have his own way," the young man added modestly.

There was a moment's pause in the conversation.

"What kind of a party would Morse be likely to form, do you think?" Mr. Paulton asked.

"Something very radical; democratic, in our English sense of the word. I am much mistaken if Morse has not set his heart on laying the foundations of a regular republican party in the House of Commons"

"Do you mean that he would undermine the throne?"

The young man laughed. "They've begun to do that already, haven't they? They're undermining the House of Lords."

Together and involuntarily both the speakers glanced in the direction where Royalty was standing in the midst of its little immediate circle. This was a large party; many of the company had not been brought so closely within the influence of Royalty before, and the influence was just at the moment a little chilling. That was not Royalty's fault; Royalty was very gracious, and knew how to show its graciousness. Still, to those who are not quite used to such a presence and influence, it is trying. We are delighted to be there, of course. Are we not free Britons? Do we not rule the waves?—go to; and do we not exult in being brought near to great personages? But the joy has a certain uneasiness in it. It is a fearful joy. We may not be doing quite the right thing; Royalty may look at us at the wrong time; may catch us in something awkward; may smile at us. All this has to be considered. Ladies were being presented to Royalty every now and then, and were ducking down to the carpet in becoming reverence. Morse was standing quite near Royalty just at the moment when the American Minister looked round.

"I don't suppose things are quite ripe for that with you," he said in a low tone. "It is hard for a stranger to understand your affairs; but I shouldn't have thought there was the least chance for such a party as that—if it really means to knock down dummies. I remember very well the saying of General Prim, after he had turned the Bourbons out of Spain, and people thought he was going to set up a republic—I knew General Prim—'You can't have a republic without republicans,' he said. Is not that saying applicable to England?"

"Seems a little odd, our discussing the question just here under the very eyes of H.R.H. himself. You had better talk to Morse about it privately some time; he will explain his views much better than I could. I have never spoken to him about it. I dine here often, but he doesn't talk much to me. I come here because of Lady Betty. She is a cousin of mine, and I'm very fond of her. I wish she hadn't married him. I have said so to her, and a pretty snubbing I got, I can tell you."

The speaker was evidently anxious to turn away the talk from politics; and the American Minister and he drifted apart soon after. Mr. Paulton was curious to know the name of the very agreeable person with whom he had been talking so freely. He asked some one who happened to come near him and whom he knew slightly.

"That man? Oh, that's Arden—Lord Arden, son of the Earl of Forrest."

"Is he a remarkable man?"

"Lord Arden? Well, yes; he represents a sort of new-fashioned school in society and politics. He is a mediæval Tory, a stained-glass-attitude reactionary, who goes in for virtue, temperance, and the working man."

Lord Arden was an enthusiast. He was one of the young apostles of a new school of purity. He believed in the possibility of so elevating the standard of morality in modern life as to make it the duty of man to be as pure as the duty of woman is always declared to be. It was understood that he made his own life conform strictly to this principle; and there was a certain unaffected nobleness of manner about him which prevented even men of the world from laughing or sneering at him. He was the idol of a great many women; matrons of a devotional turn, or serious girls with exalted views of life. He was the son of a shy, eccentric nobleman—a curious figure in modern society, for he seemed to belong to a far past time, and was indeed the devotee, the last perhaps, of the lost Jacobite cause. Lord Arden had some of his father's shyness, but very little of his eccentricity. He was handsome and graceful; he dressed well; he had a sweet, clear voice; he had a great deal of quiet humour. In the House of Commons, he was considered one of the best speakers among the younger men there; and he was already a recognized authority on many social questions, such as the condition of the artisan population, and the housing of the poor. He was sincerely devoted to the various beneficent causes which he had taken up. He positively spent more time and energy in doing good than most other young men of his class spend in doing harm. Lord Forrest was intensely fond of his son; and proud of him in a half-melancholy sort of way. In his brighter moods it pleased him to think of his own wasted career being fulfilled in the career of his son.

Arden had never quite liked Morse. For one reason, perhaps, although Arden was not quite conscious of being now influenced by it, he had rather resented Morse's becoming the husband of Lady Betty. Lord Arden was, as he had told Mr. Paulton, a cousin of Lady Betty, and was very much attached to her; not at all in a lover-like way, but with a very sincere affection. He had a good many caste prejudices, though he would not have owned to them. He thought Morse was not good enough for her; was not the sort of man she ought to have for a husband. Probably he would have held the same opinion about any other man who ventured to ask Lady Betty to marry him. But he made a handle against Morse of his radical politics and his all but revolutionary theories as they appeared to Arden. Morse was in fact a man of too strong a fibre to be much to Lord Arden's taste; and then Morse had no belief in the possibility of much permanent or long-abiding good being done by philanthropic organizations or by committees for the promotion of virtue. Morse believed in regenerating society by making men independent, by giving them education, and striving to open a clear way for all by the abolition of class distinctions. "Loose him, and let him go" was the principle Morse applied to man. He had, in spite of himself, a sort of contempt for Lord Arden's white-

ribbon brotherhoods, and did not believe they would in the end do anything whatever towards the purification of the world. Lord Arden, on the other hand, was all for men concerning themselves about their duties rather than about their rights. Lady Betty went of course openly and avowedly with her husband, and took his views of the matter, as she felt bound to do; but in her heart she had much sympathy with Arden's philanthropy, and with his dreams of manhood made pure through the influence of a social organization, a league, and a ribbon.

CHAPTER IV.

"AFTER LONG YEARS."

Lady Betty, still standing near the doorway, signalled her husband and whispered to him behind her fan, which was a screen of dull red ostrich plumes fastened into a jewelled handle, "Sandham, love, I do want your help. There's a colonial agent-general here—I forget his name—Sir Vesey Plympton sent him to me with *such* a letter of introduction—and he has such a lovely shy little beauty of a wife. They have just come, and they don't know anybody, and she can't talk to dull people—and our people to-night are so very dull! I want you to come and talk to him, and say nice things—very nice things, mind!—to her. Look! she is there, close to old Lady Fotheringham. Good gracious, what a contrast!"

And looking in the direction indicated by his wife's words Sandham Morse saw Kooràli. Changed, indeed, but still the Kooràli he had seen and had kept in his mind—more or less, less perhaps rather than more—outlined against the grey sky, with the light of an Australian dawn upon her face. How did she look now? Far more beautiful, more developed; her face even more expressive; a child of nature turned into a contemplative woman—a woman who had lived, who had had a life, who had been forced by fate to taste of the tree of knowledge.

"Isn't she pretty?" Lady Betty asked. "Do you know, I think she has a look of me."

Yes; there *was* a faint resemblance. It struck him now, struck him curiously, like a breath of icy wind, like a ghost passing. The height, the figure, the form of each stag-like head, the colour of the eyes. But there it ended. Lady Betty's quick, sparkling glances had not that dreamy far-seeing kind of repose.

A ghost! Of what? Of a past that had been only a shadow. Of an ideal that had never had any substance; that had not indeed presented itself definitely to his imagination, but had only glided by, thrilling vague suggestions into thoughts for a little while, and then fading into less than a memory.

It was strange, this flash of vivid sensibility, and out of keeping with his surroundings and with his mood of a few moments before.

He had been watching his wife, admiring her beauty, tact, and self-possession, and enjoying the sight of her popularity. He had paid the conventional dues with almost a sense of satisfaction. He had too proper an appreciation of drama—of any kind—not to perform even the conventional part of host to the best of his ability.

On the whole he had been very happy, in his way, all the evening. The course of recent events had pleased and contented him. He had been sick of his restricted career as a member of a so-called progressive government which was not progressing in anything, and it was an immense relief to him when an odd combination of chances had come in to throw it over. He had not worked against it in any conscious way, he had not really ridden for a fall, he had been strictly loyal to his chief and his colleagues; but he was sincerely rejoiced when the end came, regarding it as the end of a sham, long endurance of which would be for him an impossibility. He had a keen sense of humour, and had been amused at the idea of a man of his principles entertaining Royalty under his roof—for his ideas and principles were unfavourable to Royalty as an abiding institution. But he was not a pedant even to his own principles, and while Royalty lasted he was quite willing that it should last and have all appropriate honours paid to it. Still, it was curious how, the moment he saw Kooràli—of whom, to say sooth, he had not been thinking much of recent years—he remembered her childish talk about sovereignties and republics.

The whole scene was before Morse again; and his mind went back in an instant to all the memories of that morning, to many trivial circumstances and details—little bits of conversation and sympathetic looks—forgotten ever since then, and now suddenly brought back to fresh and living reality by the mere sight of a woman in the corner of a room. Does one, indeed, ever really forget anything? Does not the most evanescent, or seemingly evanescent, emotion make its indelible impression on the heart and on the memory, which it needs only the touch of the right influence to bring into vivid outlines once again?

Morse remembered in a moment Kooràli's own name; but he had forgotten the name of her husband, whose face he recognized. He had also a dim recollection, now burnished up by the same process of association, a recollection of having heard that Middlemist had married his daughter to a young member of the Government, a man not politically prominent in his own time, but whom he had known slightly, and who had left an unfavourable impression on him—the very man, indeed, whom he remembered having seen near her on board the steamer that day.

The two were together now. Crichton Kenway was speaking to Kooràli, and he had the look which a husband sometimes wears when he is obliged to talk to his wife in a large assembly because no one else seems to desire his conversation. Evidently he was commenting upon the people present, and she was listening in a preoccupied way, as though he had not said anything particularly entertaining. He did not look the sort of man who would take the trouble to be original

for his wife's benefit, though there was a tinge of West End cynicism in his appearance. Morse observed Kooràli's husband with an interest strong enough to make him quite aware of a feeling of disappointment, even before he remembered who the man was. Why, he could not have said, had he taken the trouble to analyze, unless it were that his fancy encircled Kooràli, the bright wild-falcon woman, with a poetic halo; and there seemed something incongruous in this mating of her with a good-looking, well-mannered man of the conventional type—straight features, sleek close-cropped head, blonde moustache, and faultless clothes, all complete—who presumably had no more poetry in his constitution than nine out of any ten husbands entering a London drawing-room in the wake of a handsome wife.

Morse was obliged to admit, however, that if Kenway was conventional, he could not be called commonplace. His long lean neck saved him from the stigma. That very neck, craning now, took Crichton's gaze full upon an Australian magnate—Lady Betty's Sir Vesey Plympton—who sheared his sheep in tens of thousands, fattened on the traditions of a lately-acquired historic residence, employed paragraphists to chronicle his doings in society, and patronized, from a sense of a duty, such colonial small fry as agents-general. Crichton moved away to speak to him, and at that moment Morse came forward and caught Kooràli's eye.

A look of relief, welcome, and unfeigned delight came into her face. She made a graceful, shy movement, with both hands extended for an instant, then, as if checking the impulse, let one fall, and gave him the other in a formal greeting. It was no surprise to her to see him. She had known to whose house they were coming. She had only wondered if he would remember her, not expecting that he would, yet feeling a little pang when she found that he did not notice her. She had been dazzled by Lady Betty, in whom she felt a peculiar interest, and she had watched Morse as he paid his homage to the Royalties, and did the honours of his house, realizing what an important person he was, noting the look of dignity and of conscious power which had deepened in him, and marvelling that she still felt the thrill of sympathy which had seemed so natural—though it was so wonderful now—when she had sat by his side on the steamer deck, and chattered to him of her puny world.

The thoughts of both travelled swiftly and met like the clasped hands.

"Kooràli. Little Queen!" he said. He could not tell why the words came to his lips. He could not think of any others. He could not see her as a married woman, as the wife of Mr. Anybody. He could only see the bareheaded girl of the Australian morning, whom Judge O'Beirne had called "The Little Queen." It was as if a ghost had passed by her, too. An indefinable change came into her face, lasting a second only, but touching him to the quick. He had struck a plaintive chord. The keynote of her life was a sad one. He knew it by a divining instinct that darted straight from him to her, and went

down to the very root of things. It bewildered him an instant. He said, confusedly, "I forgot. Time seems so short. A meeting on the other side of the ocean may be like yesterday; and yet a whole ocean of experience lying between."

"Judge O'Beirne is dead," she said simply. "He died not long after—after my father became Premier. And then," she added, with rather a pathetic smile, "people soon forgot to call me by that foolish pretty name."

"Even the pilots?" asked Morse. "Surely they were faithful to their allegiance."

"Oh," she answered, "I didn't go back to Muttabarra till I had been married a long time."

"You married——?" Her straight look forbade polite evasions.

"I married Mr. Kenway—Crichton Kenway. He was Postmaster-General in my father's Ministry—twice. Now they have made him Agent-General for South Britain."

"I think I heard—I ought to have kept pace better with colonial affairs—but the truth is that the times have been marching fast in England; and so I suppose that I have lost touch a little of Australia."

"Ah!" said Kooràli. "I understand why South Britain seemed such a little place to you, though I thought it so big—then. You are a great man now in the great world."

She looked at him intently as she spoke quickly but in a low tone. She was thinking of the part he played in that England which was now the greatest conceivable world to her. She was not awe-stricken by him; but only deeply interested. She was not wondering what memory he had of her, but only absorbed in her memory of him and of herself. Of the two, the Australian girl had the better of it. Kooràli was not in the least embarrassed or conscious; Morse was like one who is labouring to speak of common things while his mind is in reality trying to find the track of some long-forgotten or half-forgotten idea.

There was a rift in the crowd. Crichton Kenway had left, or had been dropped by, Sir Vesey Plympton, and was seen approaching his wife. Morse's eye fell upon him.

"I think that I had the honour of knowing your husband in Australia," he said, and held out a hand of formal welcome to Kenway. "I am very glad to renew our acquaintance, Mr. Kenway. I congratulate you on your important position; and still more, ever so much more, on your marriage."

Kenway, while he acknowledged the greeting, gave a sudden furtive look at Morse. He was wondering whether Morse meant sincere congratulation, and whether he really was taken with Kooràli and thought her attractive and presentable. Kenway was one of those men who only admire through the admiration of some one else. The price he set on anything was the price somebody else would have paid for it. He was curious to know whether Morse, the successful English statesman, the man to whom all eyes in England were turned just now in

expectancy and curiosity, Morse, the husband of Lady Betty, could really have seen something to admire in Kooràli.

"Your wife—I mean Lady Betty Morse"—he said, in his clear, shrillish voice, "has been kind enough to offer to call on Mrs. Kenway. May I hope that you will also kindly honour her with a call—some time?"

Kooràli had not the least idea whether it was or was not the custom of English society for statesmen to waste their time in calling on women; but she felt as if Kenway ought not to have made such a request of Morse. She said quietly—

"Dear Crichton, men like Mr. Morse don't make calls of that kind, I am sure. I don't expect it. You haven't time, Mr Morse, to make calls on everybody."

"I don't make calls on everybody," Morse said; "but you are not everybody. If you will allow me, I shall certainly make an early call on you. I want to talk to you of all sorts of things. I want to ask you about my old friends in South Britain; I want to hear from you, Mr. Kenway, about all your movements out there."

Kenway had some cut-and-dried remarks to make upon the political aspect of South Britain. Morse listened in silent attention, but his eyes strayed. Presently Lord Arden came up to his host.

"Lady Betty sent me to you, Mr. Morse. I believe the Prince and Princess are going."

Morse introduced Lord Arden to Kooràli. "I shall find you again, Mrs. Kenway," he said, as he moved away.

"I think I know some relations of yours, Mrs. Kenway," began the young man, in his easy abrupt way. "I met them just lately abroad. They're going to live in our county—Lady Betty's county, I should say. Hasn't your husband a place in it?"

"Ah! My little hunting-box, the Grey Manor," said Kenway in an off-hand manner which did not somehow strike true. "But you are thinking of the Priory-by-the-Water, the place my people lived in for generations. Unfortunately, however, the place passed away from my family before I became its representative. My younger brother has lately bought it back. It was probably that brother—Eustace—and his wife whom you met abroad."

"Exactly," returned Lord Arden. "Your brother I met for the first time. I knew Mrs. Eustace Kenway very slightly last year, when she was Miss Gilchrist, and I was surprised to come across her as a bride. Your brother is to be congratulated; and you also, Mrs. Kenway."

"We have only been a short time in England," said Kooràli. "I am almost a stranger. I do not know my sister-in-law yet."

"You will take to her. Unlike most—" Arden's slight pause was perceptible—"most women who have a lot of money, she is perfectly downright original and unaffected. I hear that she has set about restoring the Priory-by-the-Water in magnificent style. We shall have one cause of complaint against her, however. I am told that in

her ardour for reform she has begun by scraping the outside of the fine old house—our dear time-worn stone of the Midlands. Mrs. Kenway, you should stop it. You don't look like a person who could calmly see barbarities perpetrated."

Kenway laughed a little uneasily. He seemed glad of the diversion occasioned by the departure of the Royalties. The conversation dropped, and presently they lost Lord Arden. The crowd seemed to thicken as people moved about more freely. The oppression of greatness had been heavy. It was now as if a burden had been lifted, a strain relaxed. Tired dowagers could at last sit down and take their rest. The party broke up very soon. Lady Betty's parties on off-nights at the House were always early. Morse had not returned to the drawing-room. Kenway, roving curiously round, saw him in one of the inner rooms in close conversation with a young diplomatist, an envoy from a great foreign State, sent specially over to settle—some said to unsettle—a serious question in dispute with England. He had been pointed out to Kenway; he was one of the lions of the season. He was quite a young man, handsome, with small, full, silky brown beard, and a sweet smile. He was bamboozling the English Government, people said.

Kenway wondered why Morse should be so deep in conversation with the Special Envoy. "Can he be putting him up to dodges to worry the fellows now in office?" he thought. Kenway was very curious, and believed himself very observant. He was very observant; but one may be quick to observe and draw wrong conclusions. The monkey might, with the catspaw of observation, draw out sometimes a cinder instead of a chestnut.

Kooràli attracted no further attention, and Kenway, dissatisfied and a little peevish, took her away. The Americans still held the position, he ruefully reflected. Clearly, Australian beauty had not yet risen in the market.

CHAPTER V.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

It was a picturesque and a pretty sight. Lady Betty was sitting in a low chair near the hearth. On the hearthrug, quite close to her, young Lenny had flung himself down. He was at her feet; and, with his head partly turned round, he was looking up into her face with eyes full of admiration and devotion. Her hand was resting tenderly on the boy's hair, which she was touching with a sort of caress. She was very fond of Lenny, her "pretty page." He was devoted to her. Perhaps with her tender feeling for him there was mingled the sense of regret that she was childless; that no boy of her own would ever stretch himself at her feet and look up to her with love and reverence.

It was a pretty sight. So Morse thought as, returning after taking

leave of his last guest, the young Special Envoy, he stopped for a moment on the threshold of the drawing-room and looked on at the two—the young childless wife and the boy. A deep feeling of sadness, perhaps rather of dissatisfaction, came into his mind, however; and if men were really in the habit of sighing, as they do in books, Morse would have sighed. Partly he felt for the childless wife; partly, too, his feeling was for himself—not a selfish feeling, but yet a feeling for himself. No thought of jealousy, in the common sense of the word, could have come into his mind. Even if Lenny had not been so young, a mere boy in fact, he could have had no possible feeling of that kind. The sweet purity of Lady Betty's nature would not have allowed a very Leontes of a husband to admit such a suspicion. But Morse found it brought home to his inmost consciousness that he was not all in all to his wife. A certain tender frivolity in her temperament seemed to make an atmosphere around her in which he could not breathe. She loved to be amused, and to be amused with novelties; and Lenny's open devotion was as a new toy to her.

Morse remained on the threshold only for a moment, then he came into the room. Lady Betty looked up to him with welcoming eyes. She still kept her hand on Lenny's hair, and Lenny remained in his attitude of affection and devotion.

"Come, Sandham, dear," she said, "sit down somewhere, and let us talk for a moment before this boy goes home. What will your mother say to me, Lenny, for letting you stay here so long?"

"Oh, she won't mind," Lenny said. "And I like to stay for a bit when everybody else has gone. I say, Mr. Morse, I wish you would take me for your private secretary. Won't you prevail on him, Lady Betty? He'll do anything you ask him."

"Will he, indeed?" Lady Betty asked, with a smile. "Well, yes; I really believe he would; anything reasonable, Lenny—as long as I don't interfere with his pet theories—and I don't mind them. But you are not quite old enough, dear boy, to be a great public man's secretary just yet; now are you?"

"Well. but when I am grown up?"

"When you are grown up, Lenny," Morse said, with the peculiarly winning smile which had such a charm in it, "I promise you I will take you for my private secretary—if you ask me *then*."

There was a melancholy tone in his words which neither Lady Betty nor Lenny noticed. The boy leaped up from his position of prostrate devotion and clasped Morse's hand in delight and gratitude.

"Come, now, I say," he exclaimed, "you *are* such a good one. Isn't he good, Lady Betty?"

"I think him ever so good," Lady Betty declared, and she turned to her husband a quick look of beaming affection. She got up, too, and stood upon the hearth in front of the great bank of exotics that filled the air with perfume. She unfurled her fan as if she were thinking, and she looked not unlike some rich exotic flower herself in her robes of Venetian red.

What was passing through Morse's mind at that moment which made him shrink from this tribute to his goodness? Did he not fairly deserve it? Alas, the truer of heart, the more profoundly conscientious, the more honourable of purpose and pure of soul a man is, the more likely is he to feel every now and then some strange pang of awakened conscience. In Morse there was a spirit of self-analysis which is never in itself altogether healthy. Not many of the outer public, not many even among his own associates and acquaintances, would have suspected that there was in the nature of that strong, commanding man, who seemed always to walk straightway his own road, a sensitiveness too delicate, too easily touched and hurt, to allow him ever to be entirely happy.

Lenny went home after a few minutes more of talk.

"That child gets fonder of me every day," said Lady Betty. "Some one suggested that I should decorate him with a badge. I don't see why the teetotallers should have the monopoly of ribbons," she went on, in her pretty inconsequent manner. "Every one might announce their particular line in that way—white for the virtuous, pink for the worldlings, red for the vicious, and so on."

"The white ribbons would soon get soiled, Betty."

"Except Lord Arden's! I think, however, he might wear a dash of pink too. I'll institute an order for my friends. Talking of orders, Sandham, it's funny, isn't it, that the most prudish country in the world should call her two principal ones the Bath and the Garter?" she added, with a laugh.

"What capital spirits you have, Betty. You don't seem a bit tired."

She made a little gesture. "I can't return the compliment. My good spirits are reaction after the strain of the evening. I was in an agony lest Masterson, your Socialist, should make his appearance, and take the opportunity of hurling the gauntlet at Royalty."

"You needn't have been afraid. This is about the last sort of gathering Masterson would attend."

"I don't know. One expects something melodramatic from a Socialist. He came once to my 'Thursday afternoon.' I must say, though, that he didn't know I received on that day. Did I tell you? Two Cabinet Ministers and Mr. Masterson were announced almost together. I am not very nervous, you know, and I like a sensation—but, after Masterson's speech about revolution and hanging *à la lanterne!*——My dear, the triangular conversation was too funny. Fortunately, Lenny came in, and threw himself into one of his picturesque attitudes at my feet. That turned off the explosion. We jumped backwards into the Middle Ages. Isn't he a sweet boy, Sandham?"

"Who? Lenny? Yes. It seems almost a pity he should ever——" Morse stopped.

"Ever what, dear?"

"Ever grow up to be a man."

"You gloomy creature! I wish that we were in the Middle Ages—the real thing, not the æsthetic sham. I hate triptyches, and I can't

adore Botticelli. I'd make Lenny *my* page. I think he would be the very ideal of a lady's page; don't you, Sandham?"

"I think he would; and I think you would be the very ideal of a charming *châtelaine*, Betty." Morse looked at her with a sudden thrill of affectionate tenderness. Lady Betty's eyes sparkled with even more than their usual brightness; and she almost blushed. Morse seldom paid a compliment or said a pretty thing.

"Come," she said, "it is nice to hear you say that. You don't often pay compliments to your wife, Sandham."

"Still less often to anybody else, Betty."

"Yes; I know," she went on gravely. "Sometimes I don't think it would be any the worse if you were just a little more of a lady's man, Sandham; it looks nice, I think, especially in a grave sort of statesman like you. I shouldn't be one bit jealous, you know. That reminds me—I hope you will be ever so attentive to my sweet shy Australian beauty. Isn't she a little beauty—with her sort of wild melancholy, a kind of shrinking look in her eyes—like a wild animal, I think. She will be a success; she will take London society, you'll find."

"I don't think so, Betty."

"My dear, what *do* you know about it? Fancy your finding time to notice what goes on in the kind of silly crowd, the ship of fools, that we women call society. Yes; she will be greatly admired. I am going to do all I can to make things nice for her."

"I am glad of that," said Morse, with a faint hesitation. "I should like you to be kind to her, Betty; and you will find her interesting."

"I would be kind to any one *you* asked me to notice," said Lady Betty sweetly. "But she will be taken up. Her very strangeness and shyness will be an attraction. What society would despise in a mere provincial, it admires in an American or colonial."

"Quite true, Betty. You understand your public well. I only hope you and your society won't spoil her among you." After a pause, Morse said, with something like an effort, "She and I are old acquaintances, Betty."

"Yes, so I hear; some one told me. Was it you, or she?"

"We were together on board the same steamer for four and twenty hours. That was the only time I ever saw her. Of course, she was little more than a child then," Morse added hastily.

"Yes; of course. Oh, Sandham, by the way—the Prince and Princess were very nice to every one to-night, don't you think?"

"They always are, Betty. They were very gracious to me; but they don't much like me, all the same," he added, with a smile.

"Well, dearest, they don't much like your political goings-on, I suppose. How could they? The Prince rather chaffed me about you this evening. He wanted to know when you were going to start your red republican party, and try to set aside the succession. Of course, he wasn't serious. But I think it is very nice of them to be so very friendly under all the circumstances."

"Friendly to you and me, Betty?"

"Yes, dear."

"I fancy they put up with me for the sake of you," Morse said. And he took her hand in his.

"I dare say there is something of that; they have always been very kind to me. But, besides, I don't believe they think you mean anything very dreadful, you know."

"Dreadful? How dreadful?"

"Well, anything very serious."

"I am very serious, Betty."

"Indeed, dearest, you are awfully serious; I mean you appear so to the outer world. I find it hard to make people believe that you are so pleasant and boyish with me—sometimes."

"And what do you think—you yourself, Betty—of my political goings-on, as you call them?"

"Oh, well, Sandham, I don't mind them, of course. I should like anything you did, and think it all right, in a way. Besides, it is ever so much more picturesque, and interesting, and all that, to be a man with new and odd ideas—a distinct, peculiar figure, don't you know, than just to be the ordinary commonplace Liberal or Tory. I shouldn't care one bit to be the wife of a commonplace Liberal or Tory. Oh no; it is very charming and delightful as it is. I told the Prince so to-night. I told him I would not allow you to be a commonplace sort of politician. And, of course, I told him you meant no harm to anybody or anything; but that a man of ideas must have his ideas, don't you know? I couldn't endure a man who hadn't ideas. One might as well be married to a woman."

They were still standing on the hearthrug, about to leave the room. Morse took her hand again in his, and said gravely—

"Betty, suppose my ideas and my political goings-on were to end in making me detested by society; and even making you not so much of a favourite as you are—how would that be?"

"But, dear, how could that be? Of course it couldn't be. You wouldn't have anything to do with any goings-on that were not all right; and fancy your doing anything that could make people not like me! It's absurd!"

"There are some terrible evils in society, all round us, Betty. You see them yourself."

"Do I not? Do I not always say so?" Lady Betty's eyes became earnest. "The dreadful poverty, and sin, and crime? Don't I always say, Sandham, that we, the rich, are not doing one half, one quarter, what we might do to make the poor around us more happy? I try to do all I can——"

"Indeed, you do. No woman in London does more, and more faithfully and generously, Betty, in that kind of way. But you know, dear, I don't believe much is to be done in that way. Even your own incessant benevolence and charity—well, I fancy it does more good to your own sweet nature and your own soul, my dear, than it does always for those who feel its material benefit."

Lady Betty, truth to say, was sometimes liable to giving her kindnesses away to the wrong person.

"Yes; I know I make mistakes now and then," she said, with a winsome smile and a still more winsome blush. "One can't help making a mistake sometimes. But I mean to become ever so much more wise and circumspect. And if I do encourage undeserving poverty sometimes—well, anyhow, I don't think I fulfil my stewardship as badly as those wise magistrates who imprison with hard labour the men who go bawling about the streets, 'Drink is the curse of man, the Lord deliver us from drink,' and inflict a small fine on the landlord who grinds a living out of the disease and degradation of his fellow-creatures. There! A crib out of one of your own speeches, Sandham. Don't say I never read them."

A change, very slight, but still to be noticed, came over Morse's face. The eyes seemed to deepen, and the features to become more impassive. There was a tone in his voice as he answered like that in which he might address a child.

"Never mind, Betty; don't try, then, to be wise and circumspect. Go on with your work in your own way; it can't fail to do some good to somebody. But I want to try to get bad systems put to rights; I fancy that is my work in this world, if I have any work at all to do."

"You think there ought to be a new organization of all our charitable institutions?" Lady Betty asked, with eager eyes. "I do, too. I quite agree with Lady Meloraine on that. Then, you are with us? That is just what we want. How I wish I had known; I could have told the Princess to-night."

"I want a new organization of ever so many institutions, Betty, as well as of your charities; and I don't think your explanation would have quite satisfied the Princess. Never mind, dear; we must only do the best we can, each of us."

"But if you would only help us," Lady Betty said earnestly, her mind still occupied only with the idea of the reorganization of certain charitable institutions which Lady Meloraine and she were advocating, "Lady Meloraine would be so delighted; and the Princess, of course. But we thought you never had time to give any thought to things of that kind."

"I shall always find or make time to give you the best advice I can on anything that interests you, Betty."

He thought it of no use to make any further development of his political ideas just then, and was glad to put away the subject, into which he had gone somewhat impulsively.

"How very sweet of you, dear. But you are always so good to me, Sandham."

"I shall be so good to you now, child, as to send you off to your bed. I have a few things to look up yet; and some memoranda to make."

"I wish you would take more sleep; I wish you would take more care of yourself. Well, I confess, I *am* sleepy; and I am to be up rather early to-morrow."

She kissed him and went upstairs.

Morse went into his study, where a light was burning. The study was on the ground floor, and opening out of it was a bedroom which he usually occupied during the sitting of Parliament, and at any other time when he was likely to be late and desired at once to be independent and not to disturb anybody.

It was a comfortable room, though not especially luxurious, and Lady Betty had begged in vain to be allowed to transport to it some of her rare china and art treasures. Books lined three sides of it to within a few feet of the ceiling, and above the oak cases were trophies —American and Australian—calumets, mocassins, buffalo-horns, boomerangs, nulla-nullas, and other native weapons. A solemn grey bird, a stuffed native "companion," perched as uncannily as Poe's raven above its owner's particular chair. The low deep sofa was covered with an opossum rug. Above the mantel-piece hung an oil painting of a winter scene upon which the sun had gone down—a long flat stretch of landscape, snow-covered, with a straight road reaching to the horizon, and a clump of gnarled willows in the foreground. The sky was grey and cloudy, except for the gleam which the sun had left; it was cold, dreary, desolate, yet curiously weird and suggestive. The only other pictures in the room were some rough sketches of bold Australian coast scenery, and these hung over the writing-table.

Morse tried to settle himself down to a little work in the way of reading letters and memoranda. His habit was to read over a number of letters each night in this way, and make short notes on each of the sort of answer to be given to it. These he left for his secretary, who came early in the morning and disposed of them without further troubling Morse. Correspondence of a more important and momentous character Morse kept for fuller consideration. There were many letters which he always replied to himself, and which did not come under the eyes of his secretary. There were letters, too, of a more purely social order, which he always handed over to Lady Betty, who disposed of them along with her own vast mass of miscellaneous correspondence. To-night Morse did not feel much in the humour for reading letters. His mind, somehow, would not fix itself on their details. Many things had happened that night to set him thinking. Suppose his projects should fail, how would the failure affect his wife, with her sweet bright nature, her beneficence, her delight in society, her unaffected devotion to the great personages whom she loved, her desire for everything to go so nicely and every one to be happy? Suppose even the projects to succeed, how, still, would it be with her? Would it have been better if he had, after all, remained—in Australia?

When he got to this thought, he jumped up and would have no more of that. "I have done right; I am doing right," he said to himself. "I have a duty to do to this country which I love; I can do something for her people; I am *not* wrong."

Then he went resolutely at his letters again. Two especially interested him, now that he had put away all thoughts of other things.

The seal of one bore the coronet of an earl; the other had a resolutely democratic brotherhood of man and social equality about it, with its thick aggressive blue paper and the clear hand he well knew. He opened this one first.

"Dear Morse," it said, "you told me I might see you soon at any time. I will take my chance, and come at eleven to-morrow. I must speak to you. The time is fast coming, and I claim you as the man; you must be with us." The letter was signed, "Stephen Masterson."

"Poor fellow!" Morse said.

The other letter was: "Lord Forrest presents his compliments to Mr. Morse, and will be happy to accord to Mr. Morse at noon to-morrow the interview which Mr. Morse has honoured him by requesting."

"Come, that is something at least," Morse said. "Not much will come of it, but he will see me, and we shall have left no stone unturned."

The two letters lay side by side, and the fact struck Morse as curious. He had much humour in him, and could stop now and then to be amused by the mere oddities of life. "Side by side," he thought, "these two letters on the same subject—from the extremest demagogue and the last Jacobite peer; the two irreconcilables; the one just as hopeless, as unmanageable, as single-minded, as pure of purpose, as the other."

CHAPTER VI.

WIFE AND HUSBAND.

Crichton Kenway and his wife drove home almost in silence from Lady Betty Morse's party. They had not very far to go. Sandham Morse lived at the lower end of Park Lane, and the house which Kenway had taken and furnished was in one of the small streets that lie upon the outskirts of the Belgravian region. It was too much on the outskirts to please Crichton Kenway, who was a person with a clearly-defined social ambition, but it had the advantage of being within easy reach of Victoria Street and the row of buildings devoted principally to the offices of agents-general for the colonies, and the perhaps greater advantage of being not too outrageously beyond his means.

Crichton Kenway found great difficulty in living within his means, not so much because he was given to thoughtless and lavish outlay, as because he had an exaggerated idea of the importance of money and the site of one's house as a means of social distinction. He was in some ways almost parsimonious, and was annoyed if he did not get to the full his money's worth. He would grumble at the needless expenditure of a shilling, though to serve an object he would launch into a style of living utterly disproportionate to his income. If, however, he did not gain his object he felt himself defrauded, and was far

from taking the loss philosophically. He disliked to be thought poor, and to cut a less imposing figure than his neighbours. He was fond of his personal comfort, and could never practise small economies when that was in question. Thus it happened that his impulses were often at war. He suffered from the horror and inconvenience of debt as keenly as the most prudent of economists, while at the same time he was forced to live face to face with it, and had none of the capacity for reckless enjoyment of the day without regard to the morrow which characterizes the born Bohemian or the well-trained Rawdon Crawley.

He was not in an amiable mood this evening. He had been very proud of having compassed an invitation to Lady Betty Morse's reception, for he understood that she was a leader of society, and that she was married to a prominent member of the late Government; but, after all, he had not found himself far advanced up the social ladder, for he knew hardly any of the smart people who were there. Nobody paid any attention to him, and though there was a satisfaction in being within a few yards of Royalty, he did not see that practically the fact could be of much service to him. There was a faint consolation in the reflection that Morse had talked for some time to Kooràli, but it was evident that neither Morse nor Lady Betty had thought her worth making a fuss about. They had not introduced to her any of the be-ribboned men, or brought her to the notice of the great ladies; and Kooràli had not shown to advantage in the brilliant assemblage. She had looked pale, odd, a little scared, he thought. Her dress was not right. She had not that indescribable air of fashion which belongs to the typical London woman. Even her jewels—which had lately come to her by the will of a maiden aunt of Kenway's, from whom he had had but poorly realized expectations, and which had afforded to the husband and wife some innocent gratification—looked poor beside the magnificent necklaces and tiaras that abounded in the room. She had shown no animation, no ease, no power of self-assertion. She would certainly not take the world by storm. He had believed in her reputation for beauty and originality. There was no doubt that in the colonies she had been thought a great deal of, and every one had prophesied her success in England. He had expected that she would make a sensation when she appeared among the right people. Kenway knew that to achieve social success it is absolutely necessary to have the *entrée* to a particular set, and Lady Betty Morse had opened the sacred door. He had dreamed of Kooràli elevated to the first rank of professional beauties. He had dreamed of the approving glances of great personages. And lo! Kooràli had made her appearance, and no great personage had remarked her; no one, indeed, except Morse, who associated her with Australia, had taken any special notice of her. Crichton was disappointed and vexed. He felt as a merchant might feel who has bought a diamond supposing it to be unique in size and brilliance, and who finds upon comparing it with other stones that it is only a very commonplace specimen. He looked at her furtively as she leaned

back in the brougham. There was that dreamy expression which always irritated him, for it made him feel that her thoughts were far beyond the circle in which his own revolved, and that he could not follow them. It gave him a vague sense of inferiority, and this he always resented. A right-minded wife would see her husband's superiority and bow to it.

He said nothing, however, but pulled out his cigarette case and began to smoke. Presently the carriage drew up at their own door. The night had come on wet, and Kenway as he got out observed that the coachman had forgotten his waterproof coverings and that his livery was likely to suffer in consequence. Kooràli was awakened from a dream of her girlhood—a dream in which Sandham Morse, Judge O'Beirne, and the Little Queen going forth to see the world stood out with startling vividness—by her husband's angry tones as he scolded the servant for his negligence. Kenway usually spoke imperiously to those in his employment, though he had always the conventional English squire's "Thankye," and pleasant smile ready on demand for the servants of his country hosts, or even for the independent bumpkin on the roadside or at the gate.

Kooràli got down alone, and stood under the portico while Kenway finished his scolding and gave some directions about the horse, before the brougham drove off.

"Why didn't you wait till I had got the door open?" he said, fumbling for his latch-key. "That's how you get your dress spoiled, and your shoes—a night like this. You are as bad as Drake. These brutes never care how much *I* have to spend on keeping them decent."

Kenway went in first, and inspected the letters lying on the hall table before he lighted the bedroom candles. He looked over his wife's shoulder while she opened her letters. One contained a card of invitation to a reception at one of the embassies, and it restored Kenway's good humour.

Kooràli took up her candle, and was moving towards the staircase.

"Aren't you coming into the smoking-room?" said Kenway, "I have got a lot to talk to you about. I want to hear what you thought of the evening."

Kooràli hesitated a moment, then followed him to his own den at the back of the house. It was a comfortable den, and had a good many things in it that bespoke luxurious tastes on the part of its occupant. In fact, it was in a way symptomatic of its owner. The writing-table looked business-like, the papers were arranged and docketed with great neatness. Some pamphlets and reports lay about, and several publications relating to Australia and to current politics; among them the number of a review to which Crichton had contributed an article upon the annexation of New Guinea. He had not written it himself, but he had supplied the facts and got the credit for it. Crichton made a great point of the big Australian-Imperial Question. He cultivated views upon it, and hoped they might bring him into notice. There were not many other books or indications of

study. Crichton only read what he thought might be of service to him in his career. His career was a very important object to him, though as yet it was not very clearly laid out. He kept his eye on the future, and at present the summit of his ambition was a colonial governorship. He wanted to be a great man somewhere, and had sense enough to know that he could not, without exceptional advantages, be a great man in England. He wanted to make England a stepping-stone, and to utilize his opportunities while he was Agent-General in order to ingratiate himself with the powers at home; for he knew that his appointment was precarious, and that Colonial Cabinets succeed each other very rapidly. At any time he might lose his post and the income it brought him.

There were some guns in a rack over the mantel-piece, a set of sporting prints, and a hunting crop or two. Crichton quite realized the expediency of being—while in the country—imbued with a manly and British love of sport, and of gaining what interest he could in that direction. He had already laid his plans for getting a footing in the particular county to which his ancestors had belonged, and in which was the ancestral dwelling that before his time passed into other hands, as he phrased it. He could not afford to rent a country place, but he had taken an old-fashioned farmhouse, which had in bygone time been a manor house, and had now a certain quaintness and picturesqueness quite in keeping with a modest establishment and affectation of rusticity. Kenway could in imagination hear himself talking of "my little hunting-box which is nothing to keep up; but in my old county, don't you know." Kooràli had got to learn that Kenway did not know the county at all, for his people had left it before his generation, and he had been brought up after a rather humble fashion in quite another part of England. But that was a mere matter of detail.

The room, lighted only by a feeble gas-jet and the two little bedroom candles which Crichton and his wife held, had a lonely, dreary appearance, and that peculiar oppressive atmosphere which belongs to some rooms that have been closed for several hours, and are entered late at night. It is as though all the influences at work during the day had been pent up, and, as if unsympathetic to the incomer, were making themselves aggressively felt. On the other hand, who does not know the indescribable, half-soothing, half-stimulating effect on the nerves produced by the air of a room closed and darkened and lately occupied by some one loved? After the big drawing-rooms in Park Lane, Kenway's study seemed mean and small, and there was something about it which gave Kooràli the fancy that she was entering a prison. She unconsciously drew a deep breath, and loosened her feather-trimmed wrap, which fell away from her bare neck and slim form.

Crichton turned up the gas, drew forward the smallest of two leather chairs which flanked the fireplace, and placed himself in the other.

"Sit down," he said. "What was Morse talking to you about? You seemed to be having a long conversation together."

Kooràli put down her candle and sat down as he bade her.

'We were talking of old times," she answered.

"Old times!" repeated Kenway. His tone was not meant to chill. It was often meant to be genial, yet to Kooràli's sensitive ear it almost always had an inflexion of sarcasm. He pulled to him a tray on which stood glasses and spirit decanters, and poured some brandy into a tumbler which he filled from a syphon. "There couldn't have been so many of them to talk over," he said. "I thought you only met Morse once, when he was on his way home from Australia. I shouldn't have thought that you remembered much about him."

"I was with Mr. Morse for twenty-four hours on board the steamer," replied Kooràli. "I remember it very well. I have never forgotten him. He interested me. I thought him like Napoleon."

"He *has* a look of Plon-Plon, especially now that he has got stouter," remarked Kenway, in that tone of vague depreciation which always irritated Kooràli, though now she was instantly vexed with herself for feeling irritated.

"The meeting there—our talk—I don't know what—impressed me," continued Kooràli. "It all came back very vividly this evening. I think it made me a little bit melancholy."

She spoke rather sadly; and she looked at her husband with soft eyes, that seemed to ask his sympathy.

"Now I should like to know exactly why," asked Kenway. "You are so often melancholy, that it would be a satisfaction for once to get at the reason." He lit another cigarette, and then removed it from his lips to drink a little of his brandy and soda-water.

"I was such a child. I felt so eager to see life, and I fancied that everything good was going to happen to me."

"And haven't lots of good things happened to you?" exclaimed Kenway, with energy. "Here you are in England, doing your season in London, and going to all the best houses. It's more than old Middlemist's daughter had any right to expect." He laughed to himself, as if amused at the incongruity.

Kooràli sat quite still, but her eyes grew brighter and harder.

"Yes, I know. You fancied yourself a sort of princess," continued Kenway. "Oh, I remember very well, and that first year of the Middlemist Ministry. Girls in Australia, if they are pretty, get utterly exaggerated notions of their own importance. It's all a flash-in-the-pan out there—power, good looks, and the rest of it. There's nothing solid like money or rank. Sandham Morse did well to come to England and try for the real thing, and, by Jove, he has got it." Kenway leaned back in his chair, and with an expressive gesture shook off the burnt-out end of his cigarette. Kooràli remained silent. "You have no reason to be dissatisfied," said Kenway, his thoughts going back upon themselves. "It isn't as though you had had money. If I hadn't fallen in love with you, you'd have played second fiddle to your stepmother, and you'd have ended by marrying some beggarly official or rough squatter. This is a good deal better than vegetating

on a cattle station. No, no, my dear, you have done very well for yourself." Kenway laughed again.

Kooràli's face had changed. It did not look so childlike. She spoke now with an evident effort at brightness.

"Admitted—in a grateful spirit. But, however brilliant one's lot, Crichton, I suppose one may feel a little regret over youth that is gone?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Kenway. "I'd lay long odds that you are not as old as Lady Betty Morse." He looked at his wife critically, and seemed to be drawing a mental comparison. "It's curious what a difference style and manner make in a woman!" he added reflectively. "You and Lady Betty are not unlike. I wonder I didn't notice it before. You have the same-shaped head and face, and the same sort of complexion and figure——" He paused abruptly, then said, "Why don't you go to one of the dressmakers or man-milliners who turn out fashionable London women, and get decently set up? You look provincial—or colonial, which is worse."

"Do you want me to be a fashionable London woman, Crichton?" asked Kooràli slowly. "I think it might be a little difficult to get some one to teach me; but I can try."

"I want you to make the best of yourself, to hold your own, to say the agreeable thing. I am afraid there is not much use in wanting you to be admired and sought after—like Lady Betty," replied Kenway.

"That would be a little unreasonable, perhaps," said Kooràli, her eyes, with their straight clear look, meeting those of her husband. "I have not had the advantages of Lady Betty Morse. I have neither money nor rank. I have not been trained to the great world. I don't understand its ways. And——" she paused a second—"I don't suppose that Lady Betty could be persuaded to take me as a pupil. You might ask her, Crichton, if you think that you can prevail upon her, and if you are very much afraid that I shall bring discredit upon you. You should have weighed all this, dear, before you asked a South Britain girl to marry you."

Kooràli spoke with a suppressed bitterness, though her voice quavered a little. Crichton turned sharply upon her.

"You needn't be so infernally nasty over what I say to you for your good. I suppose you've seen enough of the world to know that South Britain isn't exactly a school for deportment."

"Oh yes, Crichton; or, at all events, I ought to have learned it from you. But I am a little bewildered, you know; and I don't think you quite give me credit for trying to conquer my savage instincts. On the whole I think I deserve some praise for not having danced a corroboree before the Prince this evening. Perhaps it might have amused him if I had. Anyhow, it would have made him notice me, and you would have liked that."

Kenway did not understand his wife in this mood. He did not quite know how to take her. He got up on the pretext that the gas was flaring, turned it down, and then spoke to her in a different tone.

"I dare say that you'd pick up things quickly enough, if you took a little trouble," he said, seating himself again.

"It is not so much a question of trouble, do you think, Crichton, as of time," said Kooràli in the same quiet manner, with its touch of sarcasm. "I am afraid I am too old to go to a school of deportment in London, though I can get taught to make my curtsy to the Queen; but I will do my best to take advantage of such opportunities as to-night, for instance."

Crichton eyed her from beneath lowered lashes for a few moments; but she sat looking straight before her into the empty fireplace.

"The fault I have to find with you," he said presently, with his air of man-of-the-world philosophy and his look carelessly bent in another direction, "is that you don't hold your own, especially among the family. Every one is liable to slips, but one needn't have them chronicled. It's a mistake to play into people's hands, and my relations are too ready to patronize you and make you seem cheap. I don't object to patronage, when it's from my superiors, but I can't stand it from cousins by marriage."

Crichton paused, glancing again at his wife. The disdainful droop of Kooràli's lips seemed to contradict a pathetic, slightly-puzzled look in her eyes.

"You mean your cousin, Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp. I do not think it matters much whether she patronizes me or not."

The clock on the mantel-piece struck two. She half rose with a gesture of weariness.

"Don't go yet. It does matter; it affects your position in the family. There's always a lot of jealousy among relations. That's the world. They'd sneer away everything that they haven't got themselves. The only things that can't be sneered away are money and social position. Eustace has been clever enough to pick up a Sheffield heiress, and so has got the one. Twenty thousand a year is solid. A man can feel his feet on it. You and I have got to take our stand on different ground, since we have been sold over the old aunt's legacy. But it is not necessary to proclaim the fact that our inheritance consists of some bits of china and a few diamonds. Do you understand, Kooràli?"

"I think I do. I am sorry to have been indiscreet, and to have enlightened your cousin."

"Oh!" Kenway lifted his chin and drooped his eyelids in a manner equivalent to a shrug of the shoulders. "The family would have found that out anyhow; but the family isn't Society, though it would like one to think so. You are not the sort of person a statesman would come to for advice, my dear, or a general either. You don't know how to keep a position when I have gained it for you by a little strategy or swagger. Don't look so scornful. A wise man knows how to use his tools. Swagger as a tool is not to be underrated. It suits some people. It suits Kitty Nevile-Beauchamp. But I saw at dinner this evening that you had not taken her measure. You were stupid. You annoyed me."

"Is that possible?" asked Kooràli, with ever so slight a tone of contempt in her voice. "In what way?"

"You made me appear ridiculous. When I spoke of the Morses, and said that we were going on there, you did not observe the change in Kitty's face and take your cue. Kitty Nevile-Beauchamp knows to her cost that to get into that set is an achievement. You rose fifty degrees in her estimation. Why did you not let well alone? Were you obliged to explain that we did not know Lady Betty, and that we had been asked through the Plymptons? A fool tells the unnecessary truth of to-day, which may be the lie of to-morrow. A woman of the world holds her tongue. That's part of the lesson of London life which you have to learn."

Kooràli smiled a peculiar sort of smile, and slightly lifted her eyebrows.

"The unnecessary truth of to-day may be the lie of to-morrow? Yes; I see. I wonder whether the unnecessary lie of to-day might turn out to be the truth of to-morrow? If that were so, don't you think some men would find themselves becoming unexpectedly tellers of the truth?"

Kenway looked curiously at her; a sort of sinister look it was. Kooràli's dreamy eyes had a disconcerting way of seeming to see to the very heart of things sometimes. He kept his composure, however.

"Well, Kooràli," he said, "a fellow who tells unnecessary lies deserves anything, I think."

"Deserves even to have his lies of to-day come true to-morrow? Yes; but in some cases that wouldn't be a punishment exactly. And that seems a little unjust."

Kenway did not like this sort of thing.

"Anyhow, Kooràli, the point is this. You ought to learn the lesson I have been trying to teach you, and not blurt out before people things which it is neither necessary nor desirable they should know. Do you understand? You are quick enough to understand things when you like."

"Yes," she said slowly; "I think I understand—I think I quite understand. I am sorry for my mistake of to-night. I ought to have learned my lesson better by this time." She rose and took her candle, and prepared to go upstairs. She stood for a moment, holding her light with one hand and keeping back her draperies with the other, and she looked at her husband, awaiting his formal caress.

The tone of her voice had struck uncomfortably on Kenway. There was, he thought, something uncomfortable in her expression also. It was at variance somehow with the girlish softness of her face, with the small, slender form in its lace robe that would not puff out here and cling in to her shape there, or assume the folds that fashion ordained. He looked at her, studied her, her figure, her dress. He was considering how far she was qualified to play a decent part in the game wherein he hoped to win. She knew well what he was thinking of, and a look of sadness, almost of pity, came into her expressive eyes.

"I am going upstairs now. I am very tired," she said suddenly,

and she went to her husband of her own accord, touched his forehead with her lips, and left him as if she would rather not give him the opportunity for another word.

Kooràli went slowly upstairs and into her own room. She put her candle down on the dressing-table and turned up the gas-jet above the toilet mirror, which was long and gave back her whole form. She gazed at the reflection in a dreamy pitying way. The small pale face and the deep dark eyes did not seem somehow to belong to herself, but were a part of the brilliant scene she had left a little while ago—an inharmonious part, an incongruity among the gay crowd, the conventional smiles, the jewels, the talk, the lights, the distinguished men, and the glittering women. That little figure had been out of place there. The soul in those eyes was a lonely soul, and the real Kooràli had been outside it all—a cold, starved little creature, who didn't fit into the life which would have satisfied so many women, and who would never meet the requirements of those whom it should be her duty and her joy to please. It was as though she had just missed the point of contact, yet her sympathies were quivering and bleeding. She was not dull, or blunt, or blind. She had a vague sense of capacity, an almost painful intuition as to the rights of things—an intuition that frightened her. She wanted to see what was good and great, and only the meanness and the self-interested motives put themselves forward; and this bewildered her, and she began to wonder in dreary depressed fashion if there were anything good or great in the world at all.

She lifted her arms suddenly and let her bosom heave as though she were straining for air and liberty. With the sense of oppression, there was, too, one of vague, wild rebellion—not anger, not resentment. No one was wrong. She had no right to complain of her lot. She had flown of her own accord into the gilded cage. She was well tended. Her master only required her to sing; and she could not sing to his liking. Her notes were false when she piped in the great world.

Her imagination went drifting; the lights in the mirror multiplied themselves, and the background she had left formed behind her own white figure in the glass, while other figures blended with it. What a vast, confusing, wonderful world it was—this living London! It was like a theatre in which every one had a part to play, with appropriate dresses, and speeches, and gestures. She thought of the show that evening, of the people she had seen, as a child might to whom the heroes and heroines of her story-book have appeared as flesh and blood—the Prince and Princess, the statesmen, Lady Betty, who sang her song so well, who seemed so entirely at her ease, who knew her part so perfectly. She thought of Morse, playing his part too. No wonder the Australian stage had seemed to him petty. And yet—— She had a fancy that it was not always reality to him, and that there were moments when he felt himself out of place; as if an experiment had not quite succeeded. Once, when by chance she looked into his eyes straight, she seemed to see Australia gleaming there. Just one of her odd fancies.

Kenway's step sounded in the hall below, and the bolts grated as he shot them for the night. Kooràli started from her dream. She unclasped her necklace, and smiled a little as she laid it down. She was sorry for Crichton that even his aunt's diamonds had turned out less well than he expected. She took up her candle again, and, without waiting to unfasten her dress, mounted the other flight of stairs to the children's nursery.

Her two boys, Lance and Miles, lay in their cribs. Lance, the eldest, sturdy and unimaginative, with freckled face and his father's features, was fast asleep, the bedclothes tossed off his robust little form. Kooràli only paused to cover him again, and then, shading the candle, knelt by the bedside of the youngest, Miles, who was fragile and precocious, and like a girl with his silky curls and delicate features. He was a strange, thoughtful child, and was often ailing.

He stirred as his mother watched him, and the light came on his face. He opened a pair of dreamy eyes, like hers; and put up his little hand to her neck, looking at her in a half-awakened way.

"Mother, you're like an angel—I thought it was."

"I've been to a party, darling. Now go to sleep again."

But Miles raised himself, and gazed at her with troubled child-eyes, under which there were traces of a child's stormy weeping. He had gone to bed in disgrace. The brothers had quarrelled. Miles's temper was fretful and uncertain. He was a little jealous of Lance, who was his father's favourite, and whose rough and ready patronage he resented. This evening Crichton had been angry with him, and the boy was sensitive. A sob shook him now.

"Mother, do you forgive me? I want you to forgive me. I can't bear you not to love me."

Kooràli gathered him to her. "I love you always, my little one." She kissed and soothed him.

"Lance hasn't forgiven me," Miles went whispering on. "I wanted to wake him. I wanted to give him my nine-pins—to make it up; but he wouldn't wake."

"You shall ask him to forgive you to-morrow," said Kooràli. And she lay down beside the boy.

In a minute or two the tiny voice whispered again, "Mother, I wish Adam hadn't been naughty."

"What put that into your head, dear?"

"I don't know. It's all because of him. I'm so sad when I've been naughty. I don't like it."

"That's just the good," said Kooràli; "for if we weren't sad we should lose being able to care; and there's nothing—nothing so dreadful as not to care when we are naughty."

"Do you care very much, mother, when you are naughty and father scolds you?" asked the boy.

"I try to; yes, I try to," said Kooràli, with a throb in her voice.

"I dreamed about the Resurrection," Miles went on. "Don't you wish it was coming? I wish I was in heaven. I can't go to sleep for

thinking of heaven. Mother, don't you wish we could go there together now—you and me?"

Kooràli kissed the boy very gently. She restrained the impulse to press him passionately to her. There was an ache at her heart. This was all it came to! To the tired child, and to the tired young mother, life seemed nothing better than a pageant, and to turn from it a relief.

CHAPTER VII.

RED CAP AND WHITE COCKADE.

England had fallen upon gloomy days just now, most people said Indeed, it looked like that. Trade was depressed in an ominous way; agriculture was in what seemed uttermost distress; farms were lying unoccupied and idle all over the country; there was sullen discontent among the rural labourers; there was bitter, angry, loud-voiced discontent among the artisans in the towns. Now, to make matters worse, the shadow of a great war appeared to be forecast over the land. There had been a series of irritating, wasting, little wars with semi-savage desert races here and there; now everybody said a great war was coming with one of the most powerful of continental states.

The fact was, that for some time many Englishmen had been longing for a big war with somebody—anybody. They were sick of hearing on all sides that England's fighting days were over; that she could never again stand up to any enemy more formidable than an Egyptian Arab or a South African Caffre; and they were filled with a wild desire to show that their country had fight enough in her yet. No mood could be more dangerous or less reasonable. One reason why Morse was glad that the Administration he belonged to was broken up was because he saw that if things went on longer in the same way most of his colleagues would go in for popularity and a war. Morse detested the policy which would provoke a war with such a motive. He did not believe that in this particular case there was any just ground of war; he did not believe the State was prepared for war. Finally, if war had to come, he did not believe his party could manage it as well as the other; and he did not wish them to have its fearful responsibility, suspecting that they were not sincerely convinced of the right in the policy he feared they would take up. General elections were pending, and Morse hoped to be able before they came on to rouse a strong agitation among the working classes all over the country against war. In the meantime, however, he had good reason to believe that the new Ministers were determined to go in for war at once, and let the elections be taken after the first cannon had thundered. Evidently, the hope of the men now in office was that the constituencies would never change a Ministry while England was in a death-grapple with a strong enemy. Therefore he determined to act at once. He conferred with some influential Radicals, and got

their authority to strike a stroke for them. The Court circle was believed to be all in favour of war, but the more reasonable among the aristocracy were understood to have little sympathy with such a policy; and Morse was sure the working classes could be brought everywhere into a determined opposition to it. If he were to make the first move, relying on the working classes, the chances were that all the aristocratic sections and their dependents would hold back from a movement led by a Radical, a supposed republican. But if some great peer could be got to speak out against the war policy, then Morse could lend some effective help from the other quarter. His belief was that the aristocracy and the working classes combined could save the country yet, if only they could be brought to combine. It was with that feeling strong within him that he wrote to Lord Forrest asking for an interview.

The day after Lady Betty's party Morse was to receive Masterson, then to visit Lord Forrest, and after that it was his intention to call, for the first time, on Kooràli.

Morse and Stephen Masterson had been friends at school and at the university. Masterson had started with greater advantages and far greater promise. He had succeeded young to a considerable fortune, and he showed great abilities. At the debating society he was one of the foremost speakers. Morse and he were friendly rivals. Young members generally preferred Masterson; he had more imagination, they thought. Morse was very clever in caustic analysis and sarcastic reply; but Masterson had ideas, Masterson had a future before him, Masterson would be a leader of men.

Time had gone by, and Masterson now believed himself a leader of men. He considered himself to be at the head of the English social revolution. He stood as a candidate for various constituencies and failed. It might have been better for him if he could have got into the bonds of a parliamentary life. He had married a young woman of humble birth, whom he dearly and passionately loved, and she died before they had many years of happiness; then their only child died, and Masterson was left alone. Perhaps it was the lack of her sweet controlling influence which allowed him to get all astray; for he had got all astray, society said. He had gone in for all manner of wild continental schemes of democracy, and had tried with all the fervour and passion of fanaticism to make exotic political passion-flowers flourish on English soil. It was he who had the happy thought of effecting a combination between Irish Nationalists and cosmopolitan Red Republicans. The combination did not hold. That, indeed, is putting the failure rather mildly. The attempt at combination led to a hopeless quarrel, and Masterson left the Irish Nationalists to go their darkling way. After this he confined his efforts chiefly to England and Englishmen, and he endeavoured to form a revolutionary party among English working men. He spent his money freely in his propaganda; but he was not able to make it quite clear to English working men in general what his revolution was to be. It was to pull

down the dynasty, the aristocracy, and all the moneyed classes; but it was not part of the programme, apparently, to show what was to be set up when all these had been pulled down. Men called him vain; some mad, as the eloquent Claude Melnotte says of himself, and, like Claude Melnotte, whom otherwise he did not greatly resemble, he heeded them not.

The old friendship between him and Morse had never faded or even flickered, although Morse had been such a brilliant success and poor Masterson such a ghastly failure. It was characteristic of the two men that Masterson did not hate Morse for his success, nor Morse despise Masterson for his failure. Somebody once said in Masterson's hearing, "I never could quite make out Morse;" and Masterson instantly said, "Make out Morse—you? why of course you couldn't. Who ever supposed that *you* could make out Morse?" Some one said to Morse, "Is your friend Masterson a mere madman?" "A mere madman," was the cool reply. "He has spent a fortune in what he believes to be the cause of the people. You and I, my dear fellow, are not such fools as to do that sort of thing, are we?"

"I am at home to Mr. Masterson," Morse said to his servant that morning. "I am always at home to Mr. Masterson; but he is coming by special appointment at eleven to-day."

At the fixed hour Masterson made his appearance. He was a tall thin man, who had once been handsome. He was about the same age as Morse, perhaps a shade younger, but he looked full sixty. His once dark beard was nearly all grey; his face was seamed and lined all over; his eyes were keen, wild, and restless. His long lean hands trembled. He was very poorly, or perhaps carelessly, dressed. Yet he was unmistakably a gentleman—a ruined gentleman.

"Good morning, my dear Morse." He talked in a voluble, nervous way, and did not often, when he could, give anybody else a chance. "I am so delighted to see you, my dear fellow. How is dear Lady Betty? I haven't seen her for some time——"

"Your fault, old man, not hers," Morse contrived to strike in while Masterson, who had been walking fast, was taking breath and preparing for a long delivery.

"I know, I know; just what I say. Kindness itself, Lady Betty; I always say so," he exclaimed, still pacing restlessly up and down. "But I am one of the people—a democrat, a rebel, they say. It wouldn't do for me to intrude upon Court gatherings or informal Cabinet councils. Every one knows that Lady Betty's drawing-room is a political meeting-ground; all the better for the purpose, because no one could accuse her of being a female diplomatist, and because you are—what you are. Oh, what might you not be, now that you have cut yourself loose from the mob of aristocrats and capitalists?"

The demagogue paused for a moment, and, lifting his thin hands, eyed Morse with tragic earnestness.

"Sandham, Sandham, if you had chosen a wife as I would have had you choose——"

"A woman's rights' oratress or a shrieking female philosopher, instead of a member of our effete and corrupt aristocracy," said Morse with a laugh. "Never mind, Masterson; we won't discuss Lady Betty from that point of view, anyhow. Sit down, and let us talk in earnest." He seated himself in one of the big leather armchairs, but Masterson did not at once take another.

"Look here!" he exclaimed, still pacing restlessly up and down, "I want just to say a few words to you. You are a busy man; so am I." Poor Masterson delighted in believing that some tremendous transactions were always awaiting his coming for their satisfactory settlement. "I have another engagement almost immediately, down at the East End—I should say seven miles from here. But yours is the more important, that I will say—the more important."

"I haven't any other engagement for nearly an hour," Morse said. "I am always glad to see you; always glad to hear your views and projects."

"They will soon be something more than projects. They will be great historical facts," exclaimed Masterson excitedly. "You haven't believed in me; you have said to yourself that I'm all gas and denunciation. But you shall believe in me, and what is more, Sandham, you shall help me to save England."

He drew up a chair to the writing-table, and went on in his former tone. His manner was a curious combination of fussiness and rather melodramatic declamation; and the two styles seemed to alternate with each other.

"I should like to help you in *that*," Morse said.

"Thanks!" he said. "Yes, I know you mean it, dear old boy; ever so good of you. But you were always like that. Well, I shan't keep you a quarter of an hour—this time, at least. What I want to ask you is this, Morse. You have broken away from your old moorings—God be thanked and God bless you for it!—Will you come with us?" He laid his hand on Morse's shoulder and gazed into his face with an expression of painful anxiety and entreaty in his glittering dark eyes.

There was a moment's silence. The ticking of the little clock on the chimney-piece was heard distinctly. Morse was looking at Masterson; but their eyes hardly met. Morse was thinking to himself; he was asking himself, "Is there anything in this? How, if he should not be the mere fanatic, and craze, and crank all men of the world say he is? How, if he should have got hold of a true idea, and should come in the end to have a people behind him? He would not be for this war."

"Look here, dear old friend," Morse said at last, "you know what I think of you, and I needn't say anything on that score; but I don't really know much about your cause or your objects or your following. I am not a thinking man; I want to be a practical man. I honour the thinking men; I respect even the dreamers. I am sure we should have but a poor and pitiful world of it if it were not for the dreamers. Their dreams of the morning become our realities of the afternoon. I

know all that; but I haven't time, and I suppose I haven't patience. Anyhow, I feel that that isn't my line. I am good for nothing off the firm ground of practical, commonplace politics. Now, what I want to know is this: Are you and your people on the firm ground of practical politics? Is your ideal attainable—in our time? Is it within possible reach in this next generation or so? I don't stop now to ask, is it a true ideal?—I take it on your word that it is. But, what are its chances at the present? What is your following? What numbers are behind you? What force of intelligence is with you?"

Masterson's bright eyes dilated. His nervous fingers interlaced as he listened.

"Morse, you talk like a statesman and like a man. I could not have asked for better, and yet I might well have expected as much from you. All we want is to have our cause and our capabilities tried and tested. All I want of you is that you should judge for yourself. Come and study us; see if we have not the English people behind us. Come and see."

"How can one come and see?"

"Will you talk with some of our representative men? That will not put you in any false position."

"My dear Masterson, I don't care one straw what position I am put into, false or true, so long as I have a chance of informing myself as to the real strength of any movement which I am told is popular and important. I am staking a good deal as it is; I am not afraid to risk a little more—if there is any risk. How can I see your representative people, and when?"

Masterson leaned his head upon his hand and thought for a little; then said, with a certain hesitation—

"Well, the best time to see some of our best men would be on a Sunday evening. Would you mind? Sunday is their free day. You see, Morse, our best men are not swells or smart people."

"My dear Masterson, I know perfectly well that you don't now cast in your lot with swells and smart people. I know that you have deliberately come out from among the swells and smart people; and I don't look much to them for the regeneration of England. I want to see *your* men."

Masterson's eyes lighted with joy.

"The sooner the better!" he exclaimed.

"The sooner the better, certainly."

"Next Sunday evening?"

"Next Sunday?" Morse said, thinking it out. "Next Sunday; let me see. Lady Betty keeps count of my social engagements for me; but, oh yes, I remember. Next Sunday, Paulton, the new American Minister, dines with us, and I take him on to the Universe Club afterwards. That won't be very late, however. I could go with you then. Do your people mind sitting up late?"

"They would sit up a week for the chance of a conference with you," said Masterson, enthusiastically.

"Well, now, look here; suppose you dine with us on Sunday. We'll go with Paulton to the Universe after; and then you shall bring me to meet your friends."

Masterson seized at the proposal.

"I should like that of all things. I should be delighted to have a talk with Paulton. I did meet him once, in the Senate House at Washington, years ago. He could tell me a lot of things that I particularly want to know. But——" and he seemed to demur. "But, then, some of your people won't care to meet me, Morse, any more."

"We have only Paulton and a very few others—people you would like to meet and who would like to meet you—on Sunday; it isn't really a dinner-party. Even if it were, what would that matter?"

"Well, one thinks that it might perhaps embarrass Lady Betty. I am so unpopular, Morse, in what is called society, you haven't an idea; people of that kind do so hate me!"

"My dear fellow, when, do you think, did Lady Betty ever turn a cold shoulder to a man because he was unpopular?" Morse answered, a little impatiently. "We don't go in only for smart people."

Masterson threw a queer little glance at his friend. "Lady Betty looks upon us all as so many play-actors," he said. "She composes her social circle as Doré might one of his big pictures. She doesn't care what we think so long as we make up a picturesque background and don't crowd her principal figures. But I wonder what she'd say if she knew that we were going to pull down her pretty institutions—if she thought that we were really going to depose her dear Prince and Princess? I fancy she might turn the cold shoulder on us all then."

Morse's face darkened. He looked annoyed, and Masterson was not too full of one idea to see that he had gone too far. He went on quickly—

"At any rate, Morse, I'll be here on Sunday, and I'm much obliged to you for asking me. Then you will come and talk with my people. Morse, I am no prophet, but I can see that this may be a great day for England."

He rose from his seat, his eyes aflame with enthusiasm.

Morse shook his head.

"Don't be too sanguine; don't expect anything from me. You know that you have accused me of having lately become horridly practical, and unenthusiastic, and calculating. I don't believe I shall be able to go with you; but it shan't be said of me that I refused to hear what you have got to say."

"Thanks, thanks; a thousand thanks! That is all we could ask of you just yet. Come and see and hear. The revolution is ready. It waits only for the man and the signal. *You* are the man—not I. It is mine to agitate—not to lead. It shall be yours to give the signal." He wrung Morse's hand in gratitude, and there were tears in his eyes. Then he abruptly bade Morse good-bye.

Morse had thought it more prudent not to say anything to Master-

son about the prospect of war. It would be much better, he felt sure, to find out for himself in the first instance what the strength and what the spirit and purpose of Masterson's party might be; if, in fact, it really was a political party at all, or only a knot of ignorant enthusiasts in a back room.

Masterson went off in full delight. It was always his way to think anything gained which he desired to see gained; and now his mind was filled with the conviction that he had only to bring Morse face to face with his party in order to satisfy Morse that the people of England were with them, and that Morse's place was at their head. He was utterly without selfish ambition; and having spent his fortune on his ideas, it would be the crown of his life if he might now say to his followers, "Behold, I have brought you your leader; your heaven-sent leader, whose place it was my duty for a time to fill. I have brought you Sandham Morse, and now I fall into the ranks."

Morse could see all this well enough. He was thinking of it as he went towards Lord Forrest's house; he was turning it over and meditating on it in his peculiar way. Morse was sincere when he spoke well of the dreamers. For all his practical training he was a good deal of a dreamer himself. The moment the practical part of his mind went off guard, if we may put it in that way, Sandham Morse instantly relapsed into a dreamer. He had observed this himself, and was amused by it sometimes.

Lord Forrest lived in a great gaunt old house in a great gaunt old square. The house looked somehow as if it ought to be empty; likewise as if it ought to be occasionally visited by a ghost. One expected to see a hatchment upon it, and by a curious association of ideas it brought Balzac and Thackeray at once to one's mind.

Lord Forrest never entertained, n ver had company of any kind. When his son had friends to dine with him—for Lord Arden was encouraged to amuse himself in any way he pleased—his father hardly ever made one of the company. When the friends were very intimate indeed, Lord Forrest sometimes came in after dinner and smoked a cigarette. Yet he was not by any means an ungenial man, and when in the mood for talking he was a very good talker. He liked some women very much; Lady Betty, perhaps, most of all. He would never go to her house when there was any stranger there; but he was often well pleased to go and have luncheon with her *tête-à-tête*, or for her to come to his house and have luncheon with him. Of Morse he knew little more than the fact that he was Lady Betty's husband, and was a very sincere and honourable man, but an extreme politician who was the idol and hope of parliamentary democracy.

Lord Forrest was looked up to by everybody as a man of great ability, and, apart from his own peculiar views, principles, and prejudices, a man of great judgment and force of character. His territorial influence was vast; his political influence might have been vast if he had chosen to keep it in any manner of exercise. But he took no part in political life now; he had altogether given up attending the House

of Lords. He had only once spoken in that House, and that was when some sudden and unexpected debate brought up a question concerning the Conservative party, its historical position, and its foreign policy; then he rose and spoke for more than half an hour, astonishing every one who heard him by the singular power and eloquence which he displayed, and by his scorn alike for the modern Tory and the modern Whig. There was a cold clearness about his argument which reminded older members of Lyndhurst, until towards the end he warmed into a sort of half-poetic impassioned style in denunciation of the foreign policy of both parties, which recalled some of the bold and thrilling flights of Lord Ellenborough. When he sat down, every peer felt convinced that a new and a great career was opening. Lord Arden, much younger then, and just returned from wandering in the South Seas, happened to come in front of the throne where privy councillors and the sons of peers are privileged to stand. He was at once struck with the argument, the eloquence, the style of the speaker. But the place was crowded, he could not see well, and did not know until the speech was done that it was spoken by his father. It was Morse who told him; Morse was standing in front of him. Since that unexpected display Lord Forrest had never spoken, and only once appeared in the House of Lords.

Lord Forrest did not, however, discourage his son when Lord Arden desired to become a member of the House of Commons. He gave him, indeed, all the help and encouragement he needed; but he did not afterwards talk much with him about politics and his parliamentary career. Nobody knew why Lord Forrest kept himself thus apart from active life. People talked of some great disappointment which had come on him; but nobody seemed to know what it was or to have any particular reason for believing that anything of the kind had really happened. Every one knew that he detested both the great political parties, and that he denied the right of the reigning family to sit on the English throne. He was still a devoted adherent of the Stuart cause. Lord Forrest, be it understood, was not merely a sane man, but a man of sound sense and clear understanding. He was well aware of the fact that he was living in the nineteenth century, and that the lineal descendant of the last Stuart king no longer looked on the earth. He had neither hope nor purpose of dethroning the reigning family. But he denied that because he lived in the nineteenth century he was bound to accept all the nineteenth century's ways; and he refused to see that because a certain dynasty was firmly established on the throne he was condemned to allow it to become established also in his conscience. Therefore he refused to join in any acknowledgment of a revolution which he believed to have been impious, or of a throne which he believed to be set up in opposition to divine precept. A wrong he insisted was a wrong always. There was no statute of limitation to give it legal sanction. A tolerant man as regarded others, he was rigid in ruling himself; and he would not conform to the ways of the time. So he lived his own life apart. He travelled, he read,

he enjoyed scenery and skies, and sunrises and sunsets; he loved art and antiquities and curios; he was singularly well acquainted with history and with literature; he was a linguist and even a scholar, reading new books as well as old, and not scorning even to read the daily papers; but for the rest living his own life almost as completely as though he were a hermit in the Thebaid.

As Morse came up to Lord Forrest's heavy stone portico and was about to ring, the door opened, and Lord Arden came out. The young man, who, notwithstanding his occasional diatribes against social shams, was shy like his father, slightly coloured on seeing Morse.

They exchanged a word or two of formal civility. "I know my father is expecting you," Arden said; "he is in his study. You don't know the way, perhaps. Let me show it to you."

He showed Morse the way and then left him.

"That young man doesn't like me," Morse said to himself. "I know it." He would rather, somehow, that Lord Arden had not seen him there, and had not known anything of his coming. "Of course he will tell Betty he saw me here, and she will wonder why I came here, and what I could want of old Forrest—who is fond of her, but never made the smallest approach to me; and I couldn't make it all clear to her. She wouldn't understand me."

All this crossed his mind in the few seconds which passed while he was entering Lord Forrest's study. He had never been there before, and just now his mind was too full of anxious thought for him to observe the indications the room gave of the virtuoso and man of letters. Lord Forrest's study suggested a combination of the Hôtel Cluny and the library of some old Italian palace, It was full of curiosities, rare books, old miniatures, and bric-à-brac arranged with the loving care of a connoisseur, if not the taste of a woman. The furniture was all beautiful and quaint, some of it inlaid, none of a later date than the Regency. On the mantelpiece was a clock by Bouchier, unique of its kind. Here was a wrought iron frame with a medallion likeness in repoussé silver of Marie Antoinette; there a Catherine II. gold snuff-box, with enamel paintings by Van Blarenberghe, which had been bought out of a celebrated collection. Lord Forrest was standing before a plaque of Gubbio ware painted with a Madonna, gorgeous in colour, full of gold lustre and the inimitable ruby red, the undoubted work of Maestro Georgio, as seemed conveyed by the delicate satisfaction with which its owner contemplates it.

Lord Forrest turned as his visitor entered. He was a tall, stooping, but stately old man, with a small white beard, peaked in a fashion that suggested the wearing of an Elizabethan ruff. His hands were very small and white, and somewhat shrivelled. His eyes were a deep dark, contrasting curiously with his white hair and beard and eyebrows. The eyes did not seem those of a man born to be a recluse and a dreamer, although the shy, reserved, almost shrinking manner would have given evidence to any keen observer of the sort of life which had for years been contracting round that wasted face and figure. Lord

Forrest came forward with dignified cordiality, and addressed some welcoming phrases to his guest—at first with a perceptible hesitation, which he conquered and banished by an equally perceptible effort. Then he spoke with great deliberation and distinctness, every syllable falling on the ear like the sound of a drop of water.

"I am much honoured by a visit from Mr. Morse. I do not say this merely, Mr. Morse; I feel it. I feel, too, that I ought to have put myself more often in the way of seeing the husband of a very dear young friend. But I am a strange and lonely man, Mr. Morse, and my odd habits grow on me."

Morse's answering smile seemed peculiarly sweet, because when he was approaching the old peer there was something commanding in his air, and the expression of his face was more than usually resolute.

"I am much obliged to you, Lord Forrest," he said. "I know of your ways from my wife; and if I didn't, I should feel rather more courage than I do with regard to the object of my visit."

Lord Forrest bowed and seated himself, motioning Morse to a chair and waiting for him to go on.

"May I ask, Lord Forrest, that you will consider as strictly private what I may say to you—in the event of your not seeing your way to agree to what I propose?"

Lord Forrest's impassive look changed for a moment to one of alert interest. Then he became coldly dignified again.

"I readily give that promise. No one who has heard anything of Mr. Morse can suppose he is a man to seek out or to offer unnecessary confidences."

Morse paused a moment, and looked steadily at his companion.

"Thanks, very much. I shall come straight to the point. You are not fond of much talking any more than I am. Look here, Lord Forrest, you do not mix much in the active world, but you love your country, her people, her honour, and her interest?"

"Very dearly; you do me no more than justice." Lord Forrest did not express the slightest impatience in look, gesture, or word. He did not seem as if he wished to ask, "What is all this coming to?"

"Very well. You are not content with the present condition of things in England?"

"Far from it. Who that loved England could watch her decay with content?"

"You see, of course, that we are drifting into a great war, and that we are in the wrong?"

"I cannot help seeing it." Lord Forrest bent a little forward, his voice took a sharper tone. "I see it with pain. I must say also, Mr. Morse, your people were drifting into a war just as much as these men now in office."

"I know it; I admit it to the full. That is the curse of the present system. Our fellows wanted to be popular. These fellows in now want to go one better. They will provoke a war, I firmly believe, before the elections, if they can, in order to keep in office."

"Yes; I dare say. It is a shame and a scandal. But I have no doubt your forecast of the situation is perfectly just."

"You know," continued Morse, "how easily a war spirit can be got into force. Some snub to our ambassador, some scrimmage on a frontier, a few leading articles about the flag of England, and there you are! We shall have the man in the streets shrieking about the honour of England, and the bald clerk on the top of the Islington omnibus insisting that the Ministry must declare war or resign."

Lord Forrest smiled a faint smile.

"Mr. Morse, for a Radical, doesn't seem quite a believer in the superhuman intelligence of the lower middle class," he said.

"I don't believe in the superhuman intelligence of any class. But in this instance I am sure the working men are all right, and I fancy the best of your class, Lord Forrest, are right enough also. The question is, can we act together?"

Lord Forrest stroked his pointed beard with one thin nervous hand.

"I am sure I should have no objection. I hope, Mr. Morse, you don't think I have any paltry prejudice against the working class, or any disinclination to go heart and hand with them? I mean, of course, if there were anything I could do, which there is not, I am afraid."

"Yes; there is something you can do," Morse said bluntly.

"What is that, pray?"

"Go down to the House of Lords, make a speech—moving for papers or asking a question, or anything of the kind. Denounce the policy which is now conspiring to make a war in order to keep in office. You will find the best men in the army and navy with you, for they know—who could know so well?—that we are not prepared for war. We will support you—my Radical working men. I will strike the same note in the House of Commons, and it shall be echoed from a hundred platforms. Between us we shall kill that war, and perhaps the sort of policy which engenders it."

Lord Forrest was silent for a moment.

"Have you considered, Mr. Morse, what responsibility they would take on themselves—when the general elections were over, I mean—who had killed that war policy?"

"I have; of course, I have. I should never have come to see you if I had not. If we fight the elections on this platform, and if we win, then we must take the responsibility. *You* must form an Administration, utterly independent of party. I will support you—I will join you, if you like."

The two men looked straight into each other's eyes. Lord Forrest was startled. Yet he evidently did not wish to show how strongly the proposition had affected him. His face would have been a curious study. He did not speak. One elbow was resting upon a table beside his chair. He made a movement and a little silver patch-box on the table rolled to the ground. He picked it up before he answered.

"I a Prime Minister!" he said at last. "I think," he added slowly "that at this crisis England needs a stronger bulwark."

Morse rose from his chair and stood by the hearth. "Are we not," he began with energy, not heeding Lord Forrest's protest—"are we not despised abroad, and miserable at home? Have we not drifted into a policy of petty, paltry, never-ending wars with wretched half-civilized races, whom we massacre, no one knows why? Are not our people at home cruelly taxed and miserably poor? Isn't trade pining? Is not agriculture ruined? Is there not a social revolution seething around us and beneath us? Have we not a horde of the poor in every quarter and every street, who, if they could only find a common watch-word and make a common cause, would sweep off the face of the earth the wretched sham we call our civilization? Are not these things true? Do I exaggerate?"

"These things are true—too true; and you do not exaggerate, not in the least. But what do you propose to do? whom do you blame?"

"Lord Forrest, I blame you, and I blame myself, and I blame every man who has any influence in this sinking country and does not exert his influence to put a stop to the wretched system of party government which makes the fate of a whole people only a stepping-stone to office. The mass of the people must be brought into touch with the Government before anything can be done for the prosperity or the honour of this country. Well, I have, of course, ideas of my own which I couldn't expect you or any man of your class to share. I have lived and been an active politician in the United States and in some of our colonies; and I have got to understand the value of government by the people. I am a republican in principle, Lord Forrest; but I haven't come to talk to you about that. I have come with quite a different idea—just to fight against this criminal scheme of war. I am pretty strong, I think, with what we may call 'the people' for want of any better description. It sounds too like a phrase from a Radical stump-orator or a Radical Sunday paper; but it conveys a distinct meaning. I am very strong with the people, and after the next elections shall be much stronger. Very well! You are very strong with the aristocracy, or could be, if you liked. I put aside my own ideas for the present, and I ask you, Will you join with me and help me to secure peace for England, and with peace the inestimable blessing of a Government which shall have nothing to do with party, and will at least govern the country for the people until the time comes when it can be safely governed by the people?"

Morse said all this in a low, deep tone, with no gesture of any kind; the intensity of his earnestness only showing itself in his eyes and in a certain quivering of the veins in his strong hands. He had stood up when he was beginning to speak, but it suddenly seemed to him as if to talk standing up had too much of a theatrical aspect, and, after a minute, he quietly resumed his seat and went on with what he had to say.

Again Lord Forrest stroked his beard as if in deep thought, and his white brows bent over his dark eyes, which gazed fixedly at the Gubbio

Madonna, their lustre encouraging Morse to hope that he had inspired the recluse with thoughts of action.

"Are you really serious, Mr. Morse? Do you really ask me—me, of all men in the world—to go into public life and to take part in a Government?"

"Precisely, Lord Forrest; that is what I do ask you to do. In all your class you are the only man who could do what I want done. You were never a professional politician; all who know you or anything of you would trust you to the full. The people, as I call them, think highly of you, the poor all adore your son; your great ability is known everywhere, and it is all the better that it hasn't been shredded away in a life of political struggle."

Lord Forrest made a gesture of deprecation. Morse went on, "Only tell me to-day that you are willing to take the lead of an Administration which is to have no concern with party, and I will tell all those over whom I have any influence that they are best serving their country when they insist on putting you at the head of affairs. All the strength I have shall be yours. If you desire it, and will accept my services, I will serve under you. Come, Lord Forrest, think it over, at least. The people of this country do not wholly hate and despise their own aristocracy—yet. Let them come together; give them a chance. You are the only man who can do it."

Lord Forrest rose abruptly, and made a few paces forward and back again. Morse remained waiting the effect of his words.

"Mr. Morse, I am, I might almost say, bewildered. You are a leading man in politics, a practical man, a man of great ability and influence. What you say must, therefore, have something in it worth the attention of any one; and yet I cannot understand all this. Remember that I have never taken any part in politics. I know nothing of the management of public business."

"That is exactly why we want you."

"We? Are there others?"

"Yes. I have not ventured to make this appeal to you on my own part merely. I did not think it right to speak to you until I could be certain that I spoke for others as well, and that I could give you all the strength and support I am now able to offer. I can offer to you, Lord Forrest—to you, who are, I believe, in principle, a strong reactionary—the support of the great mass of the democratic party in this country. They look to you, not as a reactionary, but as a high-minded man; as a man of commanding abilities and influence; a man of authority. We are sick of party government. We believe it has degraded us and weakened us; kept our poor poor, and our ignorant ignorant. We ask you to try a better system, and we say that, reactionary though you be, we, the true democrats, will trust in you and give you our most cordial support, and call for you from every platform in the country."

"And you, Mr. Morse," Lord Forrest said, with a grave and gracious smile, "you declare yourself willing to take office with me

in an Administration; you, who people say have only to wait for the general elections to become the Radical Prime Minister?"

"I am willing to take office with you, under you, to take any office, and to postpone my Radical purposes until we shall first have saved the State."

"I wonder how many of my friends would believe this if they were to hear of it on any authority but that of you or me? Now, Mr. Morse, I will answer you. Well, I cannot but feel greatly complimented and greatly honoured by what you have said of me, and by the confidence which you are willing to place in me. But you have overrated altogether my abilities and my influence. I am quite unequal to a part such as that which you are kind enough to think I still might play. Twenty years ago; ten years ago; perhaps even five years ago I might have had the mental and bodily strength; I might even have had some of the inclination, Mr. Morse; but then, as now, there would have been one insuperable difficulty."

"I have heard something of that," Morse said; "but surely, Lord Forrest, a mere scruple, a sort of punctilio, of that kind, is hardly serious enough to prevent a patriotic Englishman from doing a duty to his country?"

"It is not a scruple or a punctilio with me, Mr. Morse; it is a set and fixed principle. I can hold no office under a dynasty made by a revolution. I respect the reigning sovereign for her personal virtue and her great good-will to her people; I respect all her family because of my respect for her: but I cannot in my conscience do any act of homage or recognition to the House of Hanover. It is impossible, Mr. Morse. I am not an opportunist."

"Nor I," Morse said almost roughly; "but surely we must take realities as we find them. Here is the House of Hanover; we have nothing to put in its place."

"No? I had always understood that Mr. Morse would, if he could, put something in its place?"

"A republic? Yes, Lord Forrest, certainly, with all my heart; I would if I could. But I don't see much chance just at the moment, and in the meantime I think we must do the best we can for the country with the means at our hand."

"Your case is different, mine admits of no argument. You are young, you are strong; you have your place and your work in politics; you are a distinct power and an influence. Even in my hermit life I find some sound of your career borne in upon my ears every now and then, as a lonely man in a study or an invalid in his bed might hear the sounds of a military band marching past. You may well think you are bound to make the best of things as they are. But I have no call to politics; I have given up all place in political life. I do not feel that I have any "mission," if I may use that rather grandiloquent word. I do not believe I have any longer the capacity to do any real service to the country. I don't believe I, or you and I together, could prevent this war; and I may safely indulge my scruples, even if

they were no more than scruples. No, Mr. Morse; it cannot be. Deeply as I feel the honour you have done me, I must refuse."

"I am sorry," Morse said bluntly, and he got up.

"But you are not sorry that you have come to see me, I hope? You are disappointed, no doubt; but not sorry that we have had this talk together?"

"Certainly not, Lord Forrest; and I don't know that I am even disappointed; for I did not really expect that I should be able to prevail on you. But I thought I would do my best, and at least leave no stone unturned."

"I am very glad we have met," Lord Forrest said, rising; "we understand each other—for the first time. I have heard you spoken of as an ambitious and self-seeking man. I now see that you are a patriotic Englishman; I respect you; and I shall always believe in you, whatever tongues may speak against you."

They parted without many more words. Morse went away much impressed by the futile chivalry, the heroic scruples, the inflexible, hopeless purpose of the old man; the last surviving champion of the Jacobite lost cause; the man who was faithful to its memory when nothing but a memory of the vaguest kind was left. It had been an effort to him to make up his mind to go to Lord Forrest, whom he only knew through Lady Betty, and of whom he knew that Lord Forrest would not have him Lady Betty's husband if he could. Truth to say, Morse felt sometimes a little "sat upon" by his wife's royal friends and noble relatives; and a little inclined to let the spirit of republican democracy rise up within him in aggressive self-assertion. But he stifled his objections, and he sought an interview with Lord Forrest in the honest belief that it would be well for the country if a Ministry on a new principle could be formed under such a man, and would speak bravely out for peace.

"Well, I have done my best," he thought; "and now I am free again to walk my own way. I must see whether there is anything to come of Masterson and his democrats. I doubt if they have any strength behind them; but let us see. I wish to Heaven it could be made to appear that Masterson is not the crazy fanatic every one says he is. But even if everybody is right, I shall have done no harm by giving my old friend a chance of proving that everybody was wrong."

CHAPTER VIII.

KOORÀLI AND HER REEDS.

Morse then turned in the direction of Kooràli's house. He was going to make his first call on her. Even if he had been likely to forget his engagement it could not have gone out of his mind, for that morning, as he was leaving the house, Lady Betty herself asked him to call at Mrs. Kenway's, and ask her to come to dinner in a friendly way, and

then go with Lady Betty to one of Mr. Whistler's ten o'clock lectures. But Morse would not have forgotten in any case. He was much interested in Kooràli; more perhaps than he really knew; more at least than he actually thought of. To certain men a woman is sometimes like a strain of music, accompanying without consciousness on their part all the movements of their minds. One sits at his desk and is writing, and all the time some sweet soft notes of distant music breathe into his ear and his soul, and poeticize his commonplace prosaic work in a way of which he is hardly conscious or not conscious at all. So it was with Morse just now. The Kooràli music-note was with him while he was arguing with Lord Forrest and when listening to Masterson. It was with him as he walked through the hurrying noisy streets, and thought of the approaching political struggle and the part he might have to play. Morse was in many ways a lonely sort of man. Perhaps he was too busy to have time to be anything but lonely; for he was capable of close companionship and warm affection. The truth was he did not stop to think much about companionships; and he felt that he had from his wife all the affection that a man of the world is entitled to, or could want, or could know what to do with. To-day somehow he felt younger and not quite lonely.

Kooràli was alone. He was shown into the drawing-room. The windows, back and front, stood open, and, though it was London, there was a gentle sighing breeze, and summer's breath still filled the place. The light was soft, however, shaded by outside blinds. He could not associate her with broad hard noonday. She was too tender, too sweetly serious, too poetic. This fancy glanced through his mind as his eye fell upon her standing by a basket of reeds and bulrushes—rough, country, sedgy things—and a mass of ox-eyed daisies. She wore a white dress that clung about her as her draperies had a way of clinging; and the sleeves fell back from her little white arms raised to adjust the bulrushes in a vase almost as tall as herself. She looked very small, because of her slenderness, and her face might have been that of a thoughtful child. Imagination draws rapid sketches and delights in contrasts. A vivid mental picture seemed to alternate with the actual one—curiously unlike, and yet like. Perhaps it was the flowers that suggested that great mass of exotics before which Lady Betty had stood the night before, and Lady Betty herself, also slender and small of head, in her red brocade, with her pretty frivolity and girlish laugh, sweetest flower in the hot-house of society.

Kooràli left her reeds and daisies as he entered. She gave him her hand. The conventional phrases followed. It was kind of him to come—so soon. She was glad to be at home. Her husband was in the house somewhere. And she made a movement towards the bell.

But he interposed with little ceremony. The conventional phrases jarred.

"Don't let Mr. Kenway be disturbed—at all events not just yet. And please go on arranging your flowers. I should like to watch you. It will do me good."

"Why?" she asked seriously, and went back to her reeds. He put down his hat, and came near to her, leaning over the end of the grand piano, which served her as a table.

"Why?" he repeated, with his grave sweet smile, and a gesture that seemed to indicate freedom to take breath. "Because it's Australian, and fresh and natural. Because I'm a little tired, I think, of the glare and noise of life in London; the political situation—I have been facing it this morning; and the baying of the war-whelps and clashing of cymbals in drawing-rooms. It's a relief and a pleasure to see that there are such things as bulrushes and daisies—they ought to be wattle-bloom and scrub-jasmine for you. You see, Mrs. Kenway, that I really haven't come to pay a duty call, and to talk 'the fine weather,' as last night you seemed half afraid I meant to do."

His words chimed with her fancy about him on the previous evening. This was one of the moments when he stood back from the footlights. A thrill of pleasure shot through her that in her presence he should be different from the statesman Morse, whom the world knew; the strong-willed, daring, patient, iconoclastic leader of a new democracy.

"I knew you would not talk 'the fine weather,'" she said.

"We didn't do so even the first—the only time in Australia that we met; and I suppose it is just that which makes me want to get off the conventional track now," he said. "I came really to talk about you yourself, Mrs. Kenway, and about South Britain. You haven't made it a republic yet!"

"Nor have you made Great Britain a republic, Mr. Morse."

"The one may come to mean the other," he returned.

There was some talk about a measure for enabling the Australian colonies to form a federation with England.

"I don't like it," Morse said abruptly. "I think I ought to oppose that bill. Of course it's only permissive, and the colonies may fairly be allowed to do as they like. But I don't see why they should go into a federation with the old country."

"Nor I," Kooràli said hastily, and then stopped, as if she ought not to have expressed an opinion.

"I would rather have small States if one could," Morse went on. "I think human character comes out better. But we can't help the agglomeration of States I suppose; it's the fashion now. Only I don't see what your Australian colonies are likely to get from a federation but some of the faults of the old State. Look at that war the other day that we were engaged in. Nine out of every ten Englishmen here at home said in private that it was a blunder and a crime; said it and believed it. Your Australian colonists send us men to carry on the war; free colonists lending their helping hand to murder poor Arabs for defending their country against an inexcusable invasion. That's what you will get by federation."

"I am so glad to hear you say so," Kooràli exclaimed, with kindling eyes. "I was bitterly grieved to hear that any of our colonists

could lend a hand in such a cruel and shameful war, but every one was against me." She was thinking especially of her husband's wild exultation over the warlike ardour of the colonists. "And of course I didn't know much about it; and I was almost afraid to open my mouth."

"Your instincts led you the right way," Morse said. "I should have known how you felt if you hadn't told me."

Koorâli could not help remembering her husband's utter amazement when he found that she did not share his opinions and his enthusiasm.

"I should like to hear what you say in the House of Commons," she said timidly, "about the bill."

"If I should speak," Morse answered, "I will let you know in good time; and I will get you a place in the ladies' gallery. But it may not come on at all this session perhaps."

Then they let that subject drop.

"Tell me," he said. "You were going to your kingdom when I met you *that* time. Was it a happy reign? Don't you remember, you wished to be a 'heart-queen?' Well—were you? Was the crown one of roses?"

The phrase she had used and which had struck his fancy occurred to him at the moment. He had a half-wish to convey a delicate compliment by its repetition. But the compliment passed unnoticed. Koorâli answered with gentle gravity.

"The reign did not last long."

"How was that?" he asked. "Your father remained in office."

"Yes, for some time. But he married."

"And his wife took your place! Your stepmother. Ah!—yes, I see."

There was involuntarily a tragic note in Morse's exclamation. He seemed to understand it all now. His heart was filled with pity for the young ignorant creature, deposed by an unwelcome stepmother, slighted perhaps, and to whom a husband had represented liberty and a refuge. He longed to ask her some questions about her marriage, but restrained the impulse.

"I have a very tender memory of South Britain," he said. "At this moment it seems but yesterday that I watched the little steamer puffing up the river while I went out to sea."

"And yet," she said, "everything has happened since then."

"Everything? To you?"

She coloured a little.

"I have married. I have got to know the world. My children have come to me."

"You have children?" he asked. He looked at her with a sort of wistful interest—the interest that a man may sometimes feel in a young mother when the passing thought strikes him that his own wife has never had a child.

"I have two," answered Koorâli. "And indeed, Mr. Morse," she added brightly, "it makes one feel that girlhood is a long way off

when, as was my case this morning, one has to think of sending a boy to school."

He smiled rather sadly. "I can't imagine you fitting out a boy for school. I can only think of you as Kooràli, 'the Little Queen.'"

Again that shade of melancholy came over her face. She did not answer.

"Do you remember," he said, "my prophecy that before six years had passed we should meet in London?"

"Yes," she replied. "But it is more than six years."

"And do you remember," he asked again, "how you told me of a fuller life—a world filled with lovely bodiless things, which seemed so near to you when you wandered alone in the bush?"

"Oh!" she uttered a childlike cry, and paused for a moment, looking at him with eyes lighted up and parted lips. "You haven't forgotten the foolish things I said to you on that day—so many years ago?"

"I have forgotten nothing about that day," he answered. "It remains vividly in my memory; it's like some incomplete poem, or like some picture one gets a glimpse of once and once only, as he hurries through some foreign gallery, and which gets in a moment engraved lastingly on the mind. I am always in a hurry, and I have had that sort of experience."

"Yes," she said thoughtfully. "There are pictures like that, I suppose; and I know there are scenes that stay with one always."

"I told you," he continued, "that when we met in some London drawing-room, I would ask you if you had kept the fancies and the dreams you spoke of then. I thought of that last night; but I did not ask you."

Kooràli let her hands fall, and with them a cluster of daisies that she had been putting together. Her lip trembled. She bent straight upon him eyes full of pathos and questioning and then turned them slowly away again without replying.

They were both silent for a minute or two. She gathered up her daisies once more. The breeze had risen slightly, and came in through the open windows, rustling the bulrushes. It was not like London somehow.

"Do you hear the wind?" he asked abruptly, yet in a dreamy tone. "It seems to come from a long, long way off."

She smiled answeringly. Their eyes met—his had never left her face. They exchanged silent sympathy and trust. The looks seemed both to say, "You and I gaze backward across an ocean." She turned again to her reeds and flowers, and put the finishing touch to her work. The vase was filled now.

"Where do you get your rushes?" he said, in the same abrupt way, as though he were talking to cover some slight pain or confusion. It was he who was embarrassed and unlike himself. That silent passing-by of his remark struck him as pathetically significant, and, he thought, characteristic of her. It was in keeping with a simple directness she had—to him at least—in which he found her greatest charm.

"They came from a tiny place which my husband has taken in Lyndshire. A river flows by the house."

"Perhaps it is *our* river," said Morse. "We, too, have a place in Lyndshire, and a river also. We shall probably go there this autumn. It used to be my wife's old home, and her father gave it up to her when we married. She is fond of Bromswold. How strange, Mrs. Kenway, if we should both belong to the same county! I wonder if you will like the country in England?"

"I don't know much about that county, or about any English country," said Kooràli. "I have only been once to the Grey Manor for a few days. Crichton took it because of the hunting, I believe, and because it is near where his people used to live."

They talked some generalities, and Morse delivered Lady Betty's invitation, and explained somewhat the nature of Mr. Whistler's "ten o'clock."

The sudden sharp creaking of a pair of boots disturbed the conversation. Crichton Kenway came in. Kenway was always a well-dressed and a graceful man, but somehow or other his boots invariably creaked. As he was coming in, Kooràli stood right in his line of vision, and he did not see that Morse was in the room. He spoke sharply to his wife.

"Of course, Kooràli, I needn't ask; you never thought of sending about that coachman? I knew you would forget it."

"Oh no," Kooràli answered quietly. "I have sent."

Then Kenway saw Morse coming forward, and he became suddenly embarrassed. Morse must have heard his words to his wife and noticed his manner. He welcomed Morse cordially enough, however, and they talked "the fine weather." Kooràli fell into the background a little for a moment or two. Kenway had seen her cheek redden slightly as he spoke to her on his coming in, and he knew that she felt humiliated. He thought he saw Morse's eye resting with an expression of commiseration on her. Kenway was a thorough man of the world, in the smoking-room sense of the words. He was a firm believer in the "fire and tow" principle as regards man and woman. Here is the fire, there is the inflammable matter; bring these two together and shall there not be a blaze? The inflammable matter in this instance he identified with the man. If the woman was the fire it was a cold fire—a fire like that of Vesta. He had not the slightest fear about Kooràli. But an idea came into his mind about Morse, and it filled him with complacency.

"Your people are coming in after the elections, every one tells me," he said.

"It is hard to say," Morse answered rather coldly; "things are uncertain and mixed. So far as I can conjecture—it isn't much better than conjecture—I should say we are likely to be strong."

"Then you are sure to be Prime Minister."

Kenway rather affected a kind of not ungraceful bluntness, a coming-to-the-point manner. It gave an appearance of frankness and sincerity. There was a joyous and congratulatory sound in his voice as he said

these words, the tone of one who is so sincerely delighted at the prospect of a friend's success that he cares not even though the friend should know it. He was thinking at the same time what a splendid thing it might be for him if Kooràli could get some influence over the coming Prime Minister.

"If I come up to the fence I must take the jump, I suppose," Morse said. "But it is not quite certain that I shall ride. If I am to be Prime Minister there must be no war."

Kenway did not quite follow the train of thought, and in any case would have attached little importance to what seemed to him Morse's conventional disclaimer of ambitious purpose.

"Oh, if your people—*our* people, I mean—come in, there is no one but you who could carry on a Government. Every one is clear about that. At all events, ninety-nine men out of a hundred say you are the coming Prime Minister."

Morse smiled, and glanced at Kooràli.

"The hundredth man sometimes knows better," he said. "I wonder what the hundredth man says in this case?"

Kooràli admired and was impressed by his quiet tranquil way; the composure with which he showed himself equal to either fortune. She was accustomed to fussy ways, even about the merest trifles, and Morse's manner was new and charming to her.

"Shan't you be proud to know the Prime Minister of England, Kooràli?" Kenway asked, suddenly turning to her.

"I am proud to know Mr. Morse," she said with an enthusiasm which she did not take any pains to repress. Morse looked at her gratefully. He understood her meaning thoroughly.

After a while Morse took his leave. Kenway watched with close attention the parting of Morse and Kooràli. Their eyes did not meet; there was no glance or half-glance significantly interchanged. "Not yet," Kenway said to himself.

"I like him ever so much," Kenway exclaimed to Kooràli, as they found themselves alone. "Don't you like him, Kooràli?"

"Very much. He impresses me. I think he is so sincere and strong."

"Quite so. I say, Kooràli, I hope he will come here very often, don't you? He is a man to know."

"Do you think he is a man easy for every one to know?" Kooràli asked quietly.

"Oh, yes; I don't mean that. He is a man one *ought* to know. He will have tremendous influence before long. They say he will be Prime Minister. He seemed to like you, I thought. But for that matter every one does now."

Kenway thought more of his wife when people liked her.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT DO YOU CALL LONDON SOCIETY?"

THE Sunday dinner-party at Lady Betty's was, as Morse had told Masterson, small. As at first planned it was to be hardly a dinner-party at all, in the ordinary sense of the word; only a Sunday dinner-party—one of those little gatherings now growing common in London society in which the smallness of the number is supposed, in some sort of way, to mitigate the conventional objection to festivities on the "day of rest."

Lady Betty came of a somewhat strict family on both sides; but she liked a good deal of freedom for herself, while yet she was unwilling to shock the regulated ideas of the set from amongst which she came. So she had very soon fallen into the way of having small, quiet, unpretentious, deprecatory little dinners on the Sunday. This particular day she intended to have, besides Mr. Paulton, only Lady Deveril, who had written novels about society and fashion, and affected the air of a literary hack, talked of "copy," and inveighed against publishers; Mr. Piercy, a scientific man, considered even by his own scientific set as somewhat too bigoted in his atheism; and the Rev. Father St. Maurice, a young man of good family, who had been a clergyman of the Church of England and a popular preacher, had then become a free-thinker and started a service and a Sunday hall of his own, and finally had gone over to the Catholic Church. He was a favourite in society through all his changes; every one believed in his sincerity. Morse had, however, added on Masterson since then; and Lady Betty had bethought her of the Kenways, and of Arden, whom she thought Kooràli would like to meet.

Lady Betty was especially friendly and warm to Masterson. She went towards him holding out both her hands when he entered, and she reproached him with gentle earnestness for not coming to see her more often.

The Kenways were a little late. The company, with the exception of Lord Arden, was all gathered in the drawing-room before Crichton and Kooràli made their appearance. This was just as well; for Lady Betty was enabled to sound the praises of Kooràli in advance to every one of her other guests.

When Mr. and Mrs. Crichton Kenway were announced—Kenway would never give his name without the "Crichton"—Lady Betty tripped up to Kooràli and kissed her. The curious likeness and unlikeness at once apparent between the two women was again noticed by the husband of each one. Lady Betty's simple white dress had been put on with the slightly malicious design that it should serve as a counterfoil to the elaborate artistic costumes, presumably to be seen at Mr. Whistler's reception. Kooràli also was in white; and there was a little more colour than usual in her cheeks, which made her eyes look

darker and larger. She was slightly confused for a moment by Lady Betty's kiss, and deeply touched by this mark of cordiality—for Kooràli's heart was one of those which unfolds to kindness as a flower expands in sunshine. She returned it with a look of shy gratitude not devoid of dignity that was very pretty, and that prepossessed every one present in her favour. Crichton's profound bow was a triumph of dramatic art. It suggested somehow the thought of a man originally familiar to courts, but for some time an exile from their grace and splendour, and who in the satisfaction of his return to his rightful sphere marks his restoration by an especial floridness of courtesy. All the time, however, he contrived to send searching glances round the room, anxious to know at once who was there, and whom it would be well for him to fasten on and whom to avoid. He was a little disappointed; there was no one particularly interesting in his sense, he thought, except Lady Betty herself, who was of course a great personage everywhere.

They did not wait for Arden, who had the privileges of kinship here, and was not treated with formality.

Morse took down Lady Deveril; Mr. Paulton had charge of the hostess; Lady Betty introduced Mr. St. Maurice to Kooràli; he would suit her better she thought than any of the other men. The dinner table was round; the guests were not too many for general conversation. Lady Betty detested what she called *table d'hôte* dinners, where every one talked only to his next neighbour. Crichton Kenway's eyes sparkled with gratification as he surveyed the appointments of the table. He enjoyed nothing in the world so thoroughly as a good dinner well served.

Lady Deveril was a round-faced woman, with twinkling grey eyes, still young, with a mass of short-cropped hair standing out everywhere round her head. Father St. Maurice was tall, courtly, handsome, with meek grave manners which sometimes concealed a shaft of satire, as the ivy of Harmodious concealed the blade of his sword. Mr. Piercy was robust, with a bold square forehead. These two had been well-acquainted before St. Maurice became a free-thinker, and while Piercy still made it a practice to go to church on Sunday. They were near each other at table.

"Well, and how do you like your new superstition, Maurice?" was Piercy's genial greeting.

"Much better than our old hypocrisy," was St. Maurice's bland reply.

Kooràli could not help smiling; her smile pleased St. Maurice.

At that moment Arden entered, and after making his apologies to Lady Betty, slipped into the vacant place, which was next Lady Deveril and opposite Kooràli.

"I don't want much dinner, Lady Betty," he said. "I have been dining already, I am ashamed to say. You should have been with us, St. Maurice. I couldn't ask you, for we are so poor that we are not allowed to have any guests; but we do a lot of good, or at least, we try to. It's for the widows of seamen, don't you know?"

There set in a talk about the condition of things in England. Mr. Paulton was very anxious to get an accurate view of everything, and thought he could not have come to a better place for the purpose. He asked various questions about politics and social life. Somehow he found that the greater number of days he lived in England, the less knowledge of any accurate kind he seemed to possess. Up to this time he had found himself mainly engaged in the process of getting rid of convictions which he had brought with him in advance concerning everything in England; and he did not seem to be taking in many new and true ideas in the place of those he had to throw overboard.

"What I want," Mr. Paulton said, "is to get information. I am here in what would be called, I presume, a representative company, in the very heart of your London society—in your West End; and I have the rare good fortune to find a company which, though small, appears to me to include representatives of very different shades of public opinion. Now, I want to know something about English life of this present day. Can you tell me?"

"What do you want to be told about, Mr. Paulton?" Lady Betty asked. "Do you want to hear about the social revolution? Mr. Masterson can tell you all that. Do you want to hear West End scandal? If so, I fancy I can instruct you as well as another. Radicalism? Why, you are quite near my husband. Literature? Lady Deveril has written three novels—is it three, Susie?—yes, three novels—and they have all been favourably reviewed in the papers."

Lady Deveril gave a little shudder, which seemed to tell of an overtaxed brain. "Pray don't speak of my work. It's a relief to escape from it. I have been correcting proofs all the morning."

"Is that worse than collecting 'copy'?" asked Lord Arden, innocently.

Kooràli glanced at the authoress with amused interest.

"Mrs. Kenway is wondering whether you mean to turn her into 'copy,'" continued Arden.

"Oh," said Lady Deveril, with serene patronage, "Mrs. Kenway doesn't understand our literary jargon yet."

"Proofs should be read by an illiterate person, to whom the laws of punctuation are a novelty," sententiously observed Mr. Piercy.

"Correcting proofs is the most maddening occupation in all the world," said Lady Betty, feelingly.

"By the way, Lady Betty," asked Father St. Maurice, "how is your article on Venetian ironwork getting on? Have you hunted up any more authorities?"

"I hate Venice! I hate iron!" exclaimed Lady Betty. "I believe in occupation for women, Mr. Kenway," she added, turning her beaming smile on Crichton; "and I tried to set a good example by writing things, don't you know? I exhausted ferns and Flemish lace; and now I'm done to death by iron. I'll never write anything again. I can't round my periods."

"Oh, but we don't try to round our periods nowadays, do we, Lady Deveril?" said Arden.

There was a laugh.

"Well, Mr. Paulton," said Lady Betty, "anyhow, you see literature is pretty well represented. Lord Arden is an authority on the Salvation Army and the White Ribbon movement."

Lord Arden put in a gentle protest.

Lady Betty went on. "As for the condition of England in regard to religion; well, here is Mr. St. Maurice. He ought to know all about that, his experience has been varied."

"Is England improving or decaying?" Mr. Paulton asked.

"Improving," Mr. St. Maurice said, with a look of ineffable conviction. "Improving, surely. On the verge, I should say, of a complete renovation."

"Sinking, decaying, tumbling into utter ruin and perdition," Masterson exclaimed. "But it must fall into utter ruin before it can be regenerated. Everything has got to come down before anything can be put up again. We have to pass through a terrible ordeal; then will come out purified, disenthralled, and regenerated, the true England —the England of the future."

"What England wants," Piercy declared, "is true scientific way of thinking. We want to get rid of superstitions; we want to shake off the grasp of the dead hand in our literature and our social life as well as in our charitable organizations. Let us have facts and face them. Above all things, gentlemen, no dreams, as the Emperor Alexander of Russia said to the Polish deputation."

"What England wants," Lady Deveril gently sighed, "is the capacity to dream."

"What England wants," Father St. Maurice murmured, "is the all-pervading, all-quickening sense of religion."

"What England wants," said Morse, "is the sympathy of class with class."

"Yes," Kooràli spoke out with courage, "little as I have seen of England, I have seen *that*."

"What England wants," Masterson declared, "is a social revolution. She must clear out her aristocracy and her capitalists before she can even breathe."

"Oh, but surely," Kenway said, looking to Lady Betty, "you would not have an England without gentlemen?"

"Seems to me," Mr. Paulton observed, "that England wants pretty well everything; or that she wants nothing at all. But I guess there's something in what Mr. Morse says about the want of sympathy between class and class. And I think there's something in what this gentleman says, too," and he turned to Mr. St. Maurice. "You do seem to me to want a new and fresh breath of religious thought. Your atmosphere is a little stagnant in that way, so far as I can see."

"We hope to quicken it," Mr. St. Maurice said with the smile of

quiet radiance which becomes and bespeaks the convinced enthusiast. "Our time is near at hand, Mr. Paulton."

"And that time, sir, is——?"

"The time of the Church," St. Maurice said in a low and measured tone.

"May I ask, sir, what Church?"

"There is only one Church," St. Maurice replied.

"Rot!" Mr. Piercy grumbled below his breath. Then he said aloud, "I hope we are near the end of superstition in England. This unfortunate country has been groaning for centuries enough under the nightmare of superstition; it is time that the dawn came and allowed her to wake and get up and do something."

"Does science to-day call faith superstition?" Kooràli asked pluckily.

Morse thought it prudent to intervene here, and save her from the man of science. "I have often," he said, "wondered whether it is really possible for people to get to know the true and special characteristics of the age and the society in which they live. What is the leading characteristic of London society at the present hour?"

"What do you call London society?" Masterson asked.

"Exactly," Mr. Piercy struck in. "What do you call it? Is its centre in Marlborough House; or the Houses of Parliament; or the British Museum; or the Hall of Science at the East End?"

"Or the South Kensington Museum; or the Grosvenor Gallery?" Lady Deveril suggested.

"Or the Eleusis Club?" Lady Betty said with a smile.

"I give no opinion," Masterson said. "I have nothing to do with London society. If you want to know anything about the real life and manhood and womanhood of England, I might put you on the right track. I know what are the classes who will shape the destiny of a better England than ours—a true England. But what you call society is not worth five minutes' serious study to any man who has anything real to do in life."

"I don't think I seem to advance much in my mastery of the English social problem," Mr. Paulton observed, with a quiet smile. "You don't seem to be able to agree among yourselves even as to what London society is."

"What do *you* call London society, dear Lady Betty?"

It was Lady Deveril who asked the question. She asked it really in the spirit of one who desires information. Now, to Mr. Paulton, for example, or any other stranger, it would probably seem as if a Lady Deveril ought to be as much of an authority upon the constituent elements of London society as a Lady Betty Morse. But it was not so. Lady Deveril was the daughter of an English country gentleman. She had married a banker, who sat for years in the House of Commons, subscribed liberally to his party, found many eligible candidates and much election expenses for them, and was made a peer for his patriotic labours and sacrifices. In Lady Betty Morse's family, on the side of

her mother as well as of her father, peerages began to set in rather before the days of Hengist and Horsa.

Kenway looked towards his hostess with deferential interest. Arden glanced at Kooràli. There was an odd smile on his face.

"Oh, well," Lady Betty said, with a certain pretty mixture of diffidence and conviction, "I suppose society means the people that one meets and knows, don't you think?"

Even Mr. Piercy was amused at the blended simplicity and scientific accuracy of this definition. Lady Betty was perfectly correct. Society, in the conventional sense of the word, meant just what she had said—the people Lady Betty was in the habit of meeting, and knowing as well as meeting. Poor Masterson audibly groaned. Morse felt it too, although in a different way.

"I sometimes think," Morse said, "that we want a great national misfortune in this country to shake us out of our sleek contented indolence, and to shake us into a common feeling of concern for each other; to make us English men and women, and not people of different classes and sets. We have been too prosperous—I mean all of us who are tolerably well off; and we can't be got to believe that the vast majority of the English people are poor and ignorant and unhappy."

"Oh, Mr. Morse, you are right," Kooràli said, clasping her hands. "Better any common calamity than such stagnation of the country's heart!"

"You want something like our great civil war," Mr. Paulton said. "That did us in the North a wonderful amount of good, for the time anyhow. It made us fellow-countrymen and patriots."

"But we are going to have a war now, are we not?" Lady Deveril asked. "Every one says we are going to war."

"The Jingoes are trying to have it their own way," Masterson exclaimed. "But they will have to reckon with the people of England first—let them make up their minds to *that*."

"I only hope so," Morse said. "I hope the English people will insist on being heard before it is too late."

"I am glad to hear you talk like that, Morse," Masterson said, with lighting eyes.

"I am glad to hear *you* talk like that, Masterson," was the quiet reply of Morse.

"I am glad to hear you both," Kooràli said. Her husband looked rebukingly at her.

"Is it true that your Court is for this war?" Paulton asked.

"I fear it is true," Morse said.

"Of course it is true!" Masterson exclaimed. "When was there any deviltry of the kind going on that our Court circles were not in favour of it?"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Masterson," Lady Betty said earnestly. "I do think that so very unfair of you. Our Court has never been much in favour of war, you *do* know that; and never in favour of an unjust

war, never! I know that myself; but of course they are too patriotic to like to see the country trampled on."

"You have heard what your husband thinks of such a war," Masterson said grimly.

"My husband! oh yes, that's another thing, we don't mind him. Of course he goes in for being a republican and all that. I like him to have his way, it becomes him. It looks nice, and picturesque in him, and I won't hear a word said against him; but still, you know, the Court must have some opinion of its own."

"You must ask people to-night at the Universe Club," Morse said.

"Why there?" Paulton asked.

"The Universe is our political palace of truth. We keep our conventional statements—I shouldn't like to call them our lies—for Parliament; but when we meet in the Universe we say exactly what we think. We have one conscience and one code of truth for Parliament, and another—the scriptural code—for the Universe Club."

Arden laughed a little sadly.

"But I thought you Englishmen always prided yourselves on your blunt truthfulness?" said Paulton.

"Not in Parliament," replied Morse. "No; it wouldn't do there. There we go with our party. You make a speech and do your best with it in support of some particular act of policy; you walk home with one of your colleagues that night, and you and he agree in denouncing it."

Kenway turned to his host. There was something a little puzzled in his expression. He had not talked much, he had been observing; and with considerable suppleness his mind was trying to adjust itself to the characteristics of the people he was with. He did not feel quite sure how to take Morse. A bit of conventional satire rose to his lips, as the correct remark to make, but Lady Betty's voice checked it.

"Sandham, my dear!" she remonstrated. "Mr. Paulton, I hope you won't take my husband's fanciful exaggeration as a stern reality. I don't think he would say—well, the thing that is not, to save the empire—or the life of his wife."

"It is true, all the same," Morse maintained. "There is one conscience for a man's private life, and another for the House of Commons. It used to shock me a good deal at first, but now I am getting used to it."

"I hope and believe all men are truthful—all gentlemen, I mean," Lady Deveril said plaintively. "Women are not, I know; but then that's different—no one expects them to be."

"Well, we are wandering away from the condition of society in London," Paulton said. "What now, Lady Betty, would you say was the main characteristic of the London society of to-day?"

"Dullness I should say—decidedly, dullness; but I don't know that it is worse than it ever was."

"I am sure you do your best to brighten it," Lady Deveril interposed. "I don't know how any society could be dull where you were.'

"And what should you say, Lady Deveril?" the American Minister asked. He was evidently anxious for information, and did not wish the conversation to stray.

"I have been writing a novel," said Lady Deveril demurely, "in which I endeavour to show that the leading characteristic of the social life of our day is the altered position and functions of woman."

"Didn't know they had altered," growled the man of science.

"Ah, now," said Arden, "we come to my subject. I shall have a great deal to say about that some day.

"Say it now," said Lady Betty.

"Don't you think," he returned, "that our talk has been a little too philosophical already—not to say dry?"

Mr. Paulton objected.

Kenway, who would have preferred a little social froth, put in, "Have you heard Dr. Maria Lakeswell Tubbs, the American lady doctor, Lady Betty? She is giving discourses to her own sex on the functions of women. I am told that she carries about a skeleton, and dangles it before her audience, while she exposes all their secrets."

"But I must know Dr. Maria Lakeswell Tubbs," exclaimed Lady Betty.

"Give a party, Lady Betty," suggested Arden. "Ask Dr. Maria Lakeswell Tubbs to bring her skeleton. She'll make a sensation."

"She is at home on Mondays. Come with me next Monday," said Lady Deveril.

"I have a mothers' meeting," sighed Lady Betty.

"Take your mothers," growled Mr. Piercy. "It's most important they should be made acquainted with their internal economy—quite worth a dozen two-guinea fees."

"A two-guinea fee! That's altogether a different matter," cried Lady Deveril. "I'll back out. In these days of agricultural depression, and when the Primrose League is so expensive, and publishers cut down prices, one hasn't two guineas to spare.

"The principal characteristic of society to-day—I assume that by characteristic you mean weakness or fault?"—it was Father St. Maurice spoke this, "is too much self-analysis, inducing and nourishing scepticism."

"The great defect of society," Piercy declared, "is the lack of courage to carry analysis of self and all else deep enough."

"The characteristic of society in England to-day," Morse said, "is self-consciousness."

"The characteristic of modern English society," Masterson affirmed, "is luxury, effeminacy, debauchery. Society is corruption; aristocracy is effeteness; religious profession is cant."

"I give it up," the American Minister said. "I shall not get to know what is the characteristic of London society; my mind is made up. I will not write a book on England."

"Wait until you have been at the Universe," Morse suggested.

"Come to one of our democratic meetings any Sunday in Hyde Park or Battersea Park," Masterson advised.

"I wish you would attend one of our services," Father St. Maurice gently urged.

"Have you nothing to advise, Mr. Piercy?" the Minister asked.

"I? Oh dear, no; nothing. I have to do with science; I don't advise anything about society."

"There, you see!" Lady Betty exclaimed in a sprightly tone; "there is only one man of real scientific knowledge in this little company, and he refuses to give us any help from his enlightenment. I think it is of no use our trying to seek out the truth any further."

She was glad to find an excuse for not prolonging the conversation. She made her mystic sign to Lady Deveril, and the three ladies left the room. The others followed almost immediately. It was not a house where the men lingered over their wine. This was somewhat to Kenway's regret, for the claret was '74 Mouton. Morse went straight to Kooràli, and Kenway watched them while they were talking. He had seldom of late seen his wife so bright and animated. She seemed altogether more human. Mr. Piercy and Lord Arden had joined the two. Once or twice, to Crichton's surprise, he heard Kooràli give a ready reply to some remark of the man of science, who had also a vein of humour. Kenway kept his eyes and ears well open, though he was assiduous in making himself agreeable to Lady Betty. The little party broke up very soon. Morse was taking Mr. Paulton and Crichton to the Universe Club. Masterson, who was a member of the club, was to go with them. Piercy was returning home to study for a paper on the dissection of the water-cress leaf; and Lady Betty was taking Lady Deveril and Kooràli to the house of a fashionable woman to hear one of Mr. Whistler's "ten o'clock" lectures.

CHAPTER X.

"AND SO—HALLO!"

The rooms of the Universe Club, in one of the streets close to Berkeley Square, were specially well filled this Sunday night. One of the members of the club was going to take his position as head of the embassy at the capital of the foreign State with which, according to all appearance, England was about to go to war. The former ambassador from the Court of Queen Victoria had expressed a wish to change to some other place. He was in favour of a peace policy, it was said; and the new man was understood to be all for a policy of defiance. So there was some interest felt in his departure, and there was much speculation as to the speed of his coming back to London again. The whole thing was discussed in rather a light and chaffing tone; and bets were freely offered that the new ambassador would not even be allowed the chance of sleeping one night in the capital to which he was bound.

"Wouldn't unpack my things, if I were you, Wolmington," a youthful member of the House of Lords said to him; "won't be worth

your while, bet you anything you like. Stay, I say; here's Morse; he'll tell us something. If he can keep you there he will. Let's ask him what he and his merry men, the Radicals, think they can do to prevent a fight now."

Morse had come into the room with Crichton Kenway, and had been introducing Kenway to men here and there. Kenway was just now in an ecstacy of delight. Every name he heard named was that of some distinguished or prominent man; more than once he heard a really famous name. Every name he heard was already familiar to him. He had known all about the names and their owners in his far away South Britain, and it was a wonderful experience to him now to find himself in company and in converse with the living men themselves. It confirmed him in the sudden idea which had come into his mind that evening, that he would scheme for an appointment in England. He now felt that he never could, under any conditions, endure a return to South Britain; that he never could leave London; that he never could exist any more without society such as that in which he had lately been moving. Men of all parties and sections, and men of no party at all, belonged to this club. Every foreigner of any distinction who came to London was sure to be brought to the club by some of its members. Kenway had been a little doubtful in coming along to the club rooms whether Morse was really the best man to stick on to. But in the club he soon made up his mind. There was a great deal of talk about the coming elections, and every one seemed to assume that there would be a Liberal majority, with a strong Radical section in it and at its front, and that Morse must have his chance of being Prime Minister. Amid all the levity, and jesting, and chaff, this earnest conviction made its existence felt; and Kenway resolved to hold on to Morse. Masterson had been in the club, too; but he did not stay long. He was inclined to grow fierce now and then; he could not stand the chaff. He knew he rather bored people with his one idea; and he could not put his one idea aside even for a moment. He felt this himself, and was gradually withdrawing from all society. So he went away abruptly, after having spoken a few words to Morse apart.

Corks were popping, soda was fizzing, cigars were thickening the air, matches were sputtering all over the place. The drinking was very modest; only a whiskey and soda, or something of the kind. There were few pictures or curiosities of any sort to look at. The Universe did not go in for that sort of thing. It went in for celebrities and conversation. Morse had called it not inaptly a Palace of Truth. So far as Kenway could understand, every one there said exactly what he thought. He was amazed to find how many men who sat on the Liberal benches and voted blind with the Liberal chiefs were rank Conservatives in their hearts and in the Universe Club. He was surprised to find some leading members of the Carlton declaring that the time had gone by for the absurd old notions which might have suited the days of Lord Eldon, and that Lord Randolph was quite right when he went boldly in for a Tory Democracy. It bewildered him to

discover that almost everybody on both sides of the political field was of opinion that some sort of Home Rule ought to be given to Ireland. It amazed him still more to hear the terms in which bishops, archbishops, princes even, were talked of, now in this part of the room and now in that.

"Is loyalty, then, only known in the colonies?" he asked of Morse, as they were going down the stairs.

"Old-fashioned loyalty, personal loyalty, is, I suppose," Morse replied. "Some of us really like the institution of royalty, and believe in what Paulton calls 'dressed-up dummyism' as best suited for the country; others don't object to it; others again don't think it would be worth the trouble to try to make any change. But I don't believe there is anybody who is really enthusiastic and lyrical about it; except, perhaps, in the colonies. You see, you are so far off there. The thing looks all brightness and poetry to you—like a star." The comparison came into his mind as they passed into the quite street, and he looked up at the stars.

Morse stopped at the door, and bade Kenway good night.

"I am not going home just yet," he said; "I have to go to a place."

The night was fine, and Morse walked for a while. He had a light coat thrown over his dress coat. His tall figure and commanding presence made him conspicuous. Once or twice, as Kenway followed him at a little distance through Berkeley Square and into Dover Street and Piccadilly, some one recognized Morse, and looked after him and mentioned his name.

As Kenway followed him? Yes: Kenway was a man who dearly loved to find out things about people. He had a fixed idea that there was something to be found out about every man, if one only gave himself to the task of detection. He was very curious to know where a man like Morse could be going at that late hour of the Sunday night. It might be a good thing, he thought, in any case to make some discovery, if there were any to be made. No one could say when such knowledge might not come in usefully; at all events, it would be well to know. Kenway smiled; almost chuckled—a somewhat malign chuckle. A good many conflicting feelings were at work within him that evening. He had been obliged once or twice to readjust his mental attitude. Several things had surprised him. It had surprised him that his wife should appear at ease, should even shine, in the society of Morse and his friends. He himself had felt a little out of it all. Though he swelled with exultation at the thought of having been taken up and introduced at the Universe by Morse, he was nevertheless galled by a consciousness of inferiority. He was glad to see that Morse admired Koràli. He meant to turn the fact to his own advantage: yet, it irritated him too, and Koràli's evident admiration of Morse made him jealous in a vague, pettish way. It was he himself, her husband, who should be Koràli's hero—not any other man. He would like to show her that Morse was not so far above the peccadilloes of ordinary men. Morse, he thought, always postured as such a

stately and serious sort of person. It would be good fun if he could find out something about Morse which would astonish Kooràli. The chance of doing this gave a fresh impulse to Kenway's sleuth-hound instincts. The suspicion in his mind was that Morse's midnight mission would prove to be of a distinctly non-political character. Kenway was highly amused already; he enjoyed the discovery in anticipation. He always gloated over hints of scandal in high places. What he could not understand was, why Morse should walk. Why did he not get into a cab? Surely he must know that there was at least a chance of people recognizing him. But that is just the way with men, Kenway said to himself philosophically; they are always most incautious when the condition of things especially calls for caution.

The reason why Morse walked was because the night was fine and Morse loved walking, especially at night. He was hardly ever seen in a carriage; he rode or he walked. He did not ride much in the Row; he went out to Hampstead Heath or to one of the commons on the south side and had a hard gallop there; and he took long walks when he could. He loved a walk through the streets at night; he loved to study the changed aspect of the great city, and to see familiar bits of London made unfamiliar and poetic by moonlight or starlight, or by mist and darkness. To him there was a fascination in the vistas of lights; in the dim outlines of the buildings; in the moving crowd—eyes flashing into his for an instant, suggesting perhaps the tragedy of a life; forms hurrying by and then lost in the dimness. He was moved in a strange way by the contrasts in this "under-world," as it seemed—of wealth and squalor, of vice and innocence, of gloom and brightness, mysterious alleys, dark and sad as hell, leading from some gay resort, over which shone silvery electric light that might have been the radiance of heaven.

He paused now for a second in an almost deserted street, struck by the effect of a short avenue of red gas lamps, converging to a point from which an indistinct shape and two brilliant staring eyes—the lamps of a hansom cab—flew towards him. As he walked along he was not thinking of the fencing of diplomatists, of squabbles about a frontier, of the chances of a Liberal majority, of the probability that he would be called upon to lead a Radical ministry. He liked to be lifted out of the prosaic world of politics for a while, and he distinctly held the position that the night, even among streets, is always poetic. That vein in Morse's nature which had poetry and mysticism in it seemed to fill and flow under the influence of night.

So they came, Morse and his follower, to Leicester Square. Leicester Square on Sunday evening had a very different look from that which it wore on a week night. Three sides of it were in shadow. Only the north end, where there were several restaurants and a chemist's shop, with big red and green lamps, gave any suggestion of its usual flaring illumination. The theatres seemed strangely forlorn, and the Alhambra, with its dome-like roof, its long dark windows, its pale front and fantastic decorations, had a sad and ghostly appearance.

There were but few people about; a hansom now and then clattered up to the door of one of the restaurants, where the homeless stranger could have a Sunday dinner. Kenway followed Morse to the opening of a dim and narrow street leading northward out of the square. The street began in light and went on into mere darkness. At the near corner was a brilliantly lighted French restaurant, one glass side opening on the square. Opposite it, the houses were dark, and further on, at the same side as the restaurant, they were dark too. Except for two dim gas-lamps nearly at the top of the street, all the light seemed concentrated here, and any one passing the illuminated windows could be seen as clearly as in daylight.

Morse paused a moment, glanced quickly up the street, then crossed over to the side in shadow. He walked a little way along the pavement, turned, and crossed again. Between the restaurant and the adjoining block was a small flagged courtyard, enclosed by buildings except where it was fenced off from the road by an iron railing. It was feebly lighted by two round lamps facing each other, hung over doors, above one of which was painted "Concierge." The hotel itself stood far back, a grey sunken house, with an abutting sort of colonnade, and a mean entrance door. The upper windows were dark, except one, and that was curtained by a thick white blind. The house was lower than its neighbours, and between the chimney-pots patches of grey sky showed, and a thin moon was just rising. It all looked dim, mysterious, and suggestive of intrigue. Innumerable memories of French novels floated into Kenway's mind. Morse entered the courtyard, and went into the hotel. Kenway had been watching from a vantage point a little way up the street on the opposite side. When Morse had gone in, Kenway came down and had a look at the place. The courtyard was deserted again. A French chambermaid in a white cap with gauffred frills and streamers ran across, her sabots clacking, and disappeared into the concierge's office. Kenway skulked into the courtyard. He thought he heard voices in the lighted room upstairs. Once or twice he saw the shadow of a man cross the blind. He could almost have sworn that he caught a glimpse of Morse's Napoleonic profile. After a while there were no more shadows. Kenway peered round. The place had an odd foreign look, strange in the heart of London. Sickly shrubs in green boxes stood about. There was an old gun carriage in the centre of the court, with a beam of timber painted a dull leaden blue, doing duty as cannon, but with a pile of genuine balls formidably arranged below. "Just like England's defences," Kenway snarled and chuckled to himself. "If we have the guns, we haven't the bullets; if we have the bullets, we haven't the guns. Things won't be much better under a Peace Society Prime Minister, I fancy." It relieved him to say this, although only to himself; and he crossed the street again and kept pacing up and down on the look-out.

It was slow work waiting there that Sunday night; but Kenway waited. His sleuth-hound instincts were aided in their work by a

patience as untiring as that of the forest Indian watching his prey, or that of a heron perched on some jammed-up log in a river bank, and waiting for a fish to give him a chance of a dinner. Occasionally some woman tried to get into talk with Kenway as he paced slowly up and down; he answered her with a word or two of good-humoured jest, and civilly shook her off. Now and then a policeman eyed him curiously, but soon, with a policeman's instinct, saw that Kenway was what is called a gentleman, and that there was nothing in his case to have interest for the "worthy magistrate" on Monday morning. More than once a half-drunken wayfarer staggered up and accosted him with "Give us a light, governor, won't you?" and Kenway, always with the most perfect good humour and politeness, took out his silver matchbox with its ingeniously-contorted monogram, and gave the requested fire. It was not always to much account, for more than one wayfarer found his legs too unsteady and his pipe too capricious to be able to benefit by the kindness of the "governor." Kenway was quite in his element, and liked the whole thing immensely. He was convinced that he was about to find something out.

At last he saw two men come out of the door of the hotel. The men passed across the courtyard, and their figures were clearly outlined against the light in the lower windows. Morse was one. There was no mistaking that figure and that walk. But who was the other? The two went down the street, on the side opposite to that where Kenway stood in shadow; they did not look in his direction, but he could see them distinctly. He could hear their voices, although he could not make out what they were saying. Now the light of a lamp fell straight and full on them, and Kenway saw, to his disappointment at first, that the other man was Masterson. No creature could be got to associate the name of Masterson with any manner of amorous adventure or any gambling-house transaction. His presence alone would make scandal of that kind an impossibility. Had Kenway thrown all his time, his sleuth-hound instinct, his patience, utterly away?

No; another idea suddenly flashed upon him. Why, this is better still; the best that could be! That house is the head-quarters of some socialist and democratic conspiracy, and Morse has been induced to take some part in it. Morse, the man who hopes to be Prime Minister of England, comes down so low as to mix himself up with the midnight councils of a gang of socialist and cosmopolitan revolutionists. It must be so, it cannot be anything else. Why, this is more interesting than all the gaming transactions from Monaco to the Mississippi. Kenway went nearer to the house. There must be others there; they would come out; he would see what manner of men they were. His patience was soon rewarded; the men began to come out in little knots of two and three. Most of them were of the class of the regular London socialist; most were London working men. Even with Kenway's limited knowledge of such London life, he could read their class and their political creed in their earnest, eager, wistful faces.

But there were others, too; there were foreign democrats, talking rapidly, some in French, some in German, some in Italian. Two or three, who came out together, conversed in a soft-sounding tongue which was unfamiliar to Kenway. He did not understand German or Italian; but he knew that this was German and that Italian when he heard it spoken. This language was entirely strange to him. He felt a special interest in the men who spoke it, and he went their way. He kept up with them, he walking on the other side of the street. They were going eastward; he might as well go eastward too, for a little way.

A new thought struck him. Why not contrive to interchange a word or two with them? He took out his cigar-case, and acted on the hint given him by his "governor" acquaintances. He crossed the street, and asked if any of the gentlemen could give him a light. They all stopped very civilly, and one of them tendered to him a box of fusees. A few courteous words were naturally exchanged; two of the men at least spoke fluent and perfect English, with only a faint foreign accent; the third man said nothing; perhaps he could not speak English. They were dressed in a way which suggested a cross between struggling artist and continental working-man; between the Latin Quarter and the Faubourg Saint Antoine. Kenway had a keen eye, and it seemed to him that the garb was a get-up, that they were not wearing their own clothes, that they were socially of a better class than their outward appearance was meant to suggest. The quiet, courteous, self-assured way in which they all stopped the moment he spoke to them satisfied him that they were, in Society's language, "gentlemen." "I rather fancy I know a gentleman when I see him," Kenway said to himself. Kenway was always assuring himself and conveying to others that he was a constituted authority on all questions relating to the composition, origin, and ways of a gentleman.

Now, then, here is the problem. A secret meeting long after midnight in an out-of-the-way quarter—for Morse; the meeting attended by Masterson, the wild revolutionary socialist, who was always threatening that he and his men would descend into the streets; by several foreign democrats, for such they evidently were; and by three men, dressed as artisans, who were clearly not artisans, and who spoke a language Kenway had never heard before, while two of them could also speak fluent and cultured English. What was the language the three spoke? Kenway was not long in jumping to a conclusion. Why, what should it be but the language of the country with which England was likely to go to war? And at the secret midnight council in which these men took part, in which Masterson took part, in which foreign revolutionaries took part, the future Prime Minister of England was also taking part! Come, that was something to know, at all events. There might, no doubt, be some highly satisfactory explanation; but the thing was curious. It was well to have found out what Kenway had found out. He went home well pleased—more than pleased, highly delighted, with his night's work.

Now, what were Morse and Masterson saying as they passed near to

where Crichton Kenway was standing in the shadow, watching them and trying to make out their words?

"I am afraid it is of no use," Morse said in a low tone; "I don't see my way. I am with your objects to a certain extent; you know that. I am a republican on principle. I don't despair of seeing a republic established here, even in my time. I think our people could work a republic better than any other people in the world. I hope to found a republican party, open and avowed, if only as a training school. But you can't force the thing in England."

"That is the way of all you so-called practical men," Masterson said angrily. "You see nothing; you foresee nothing. The revolution is at your gates—hammering at your gates, and you are deaf; and you believe that to-morrow must be just the same as to-day."

"I don't. I want to prepare for a to-morrow. An accident might bring the whole thing to a smash. A big defeat in some war"—Morse spoke now with measured emphasis—"which was believed to be favoured by the Court, one big defeat, might upset the dynasty. The English people have not been tried in that sort of furnace yet. Perhaps they would be found not a whit more patient than the French. We may see that tested; perhaps. After all, I am the best friend of the dynasty, I think," he added, with a smile, "for I am doing my very best to prevent the test from being applied."

"Will you even join with us to stop the succession at the end of this reign? We have our plans and our resources. The country will have had enough of royalty by that time; sane men won't be inclined to give it a fresh lease under worse conditions."

Morse shook his head. They were now walking along the darker side of Piccadilly, and had got to the railings of the Green Park and the deep shadow of the trees.

"To speak openly, Masterson, I doubt the plans, and I don't believe in the resources. But I don't mind telling you that if I were alive at the end of the present reign, and I saw any genuine and wide-spread desire on the part of the English people not to start a new reign, I should—well——"

"Give the subject your best consideration, I dare say," Masterson interposed scornfully. "That is your ministerial way of putting things in Parliament, isn't it?"

"No," said Morse, composedly; "I should go with that desire, and do my best to carry it out, let the end land me where it would. That's all I have to say."

"Well," Masterson said, after a long pause, "that is better than nothing; especially from you who mean all you say, and more. But you do not go with us, in the meantime?"

"No; positively not. You are all in the clouds, and I am only able to walk the firm earth."

"Then what do you think of our general purposes; our broader and more comprehensive purposes; our purposes for all humanity; not for England alone?"

Morse turned to Masterson with a look of something like compassion. Then he said—"Your cosmopolitanism? I don't like the thing at all. And I tell you frankly, Masterson, I couldn't have anything to do with it. I don't believe one bit in mixing up our affairs with those of your continental democrats. Their aims are not ours; their ways are not ours. We want reform, and they understand nothing but revolution, and social revolution, too——"

"So do I," Masterson broke in. "I want social revolution; in other words, I want the salvation of England. Nothing but social revolution can save her."

"Yes; but your social revolution is not their social revolution, don't you see? You can't long work together. Besides, look here, I don't like these three gentlemanlike fellows at all. I do not trust them. For God's sake, Masterson, don't you trust in them! Do you really believe that these men, who belong to the country which five out of every six Englishmen declare to be our unrelenting enemy, can have the interest of England at heart?"

"Not the interest of England," Masterson said sharply. "You don't understand, Morse; you won't understand. They have the interest of humanity at heart; the interest of the brotherhood of both countries, and of all countries. Good heavens! is it possible you don't see that there is some stronger and nobler bond than the mere chance bond of nationality? It *is* strange that a man like you should so cruelly misunderstand men like them."

"Will you bear to be told what I think of them?" Morse asked, and he stopped short and put his hand gently on Masterson's shoulder. "Dear old friend, will you be offended with me if I tell you what I suspect—for your own sake?"

"Say anything you like, Morse; I can stand it from you."

"Well, then, I strongly suspect that these men are the secret agents of that Government which they profess to detest; the Government of their own country."

"Oh!" Masterson drew away with a cry and a look of utter disgust. "I am horrified, Morse! Such a suspicion, so unworthy of you! These true-hearted, devoted men! You must see more of them. You must learn to know them."

"No, old man; I don't want to see them again. I only wish I could get you not to see them again."

Masterson shook his head impatiently.

"Well, I know it isn't easy to turn you from any opinion or any purpose; and I can only say I am sorry I couldn't have anything to do with the business, Masterson. Nothing good will come of it; nothing but harm. I would save my dear old friend from it if I could, but I can't; and so—hallo!"

"So what?" Masterson asked in wonder, at what seemed to him unmeaning levity.

"I beg your pardon," Morse said, with a smile. "It's a trick I got from Richter, Jean Paul, you know—a way he has of putting an end

to some argument that can't come to anything. My wife and I have fallen into the way of using it, and have dismissed many an unmanageable subject with 'and so—hallo!' Well, I can't convince you, Masterson, and you can't convince me; but we are good friends still, and ever shall be to the end of the chapter, I trust; and so—hallo!"

Masterson was not much of a humourist, but a sort of faint perception stole upon him that this, indeed, was about as good a way as any of getting out of a hopeless controversy. He made a brave effort to rise for once to the level of a joke, and as they were about to part in Piccadilly he fell back a little, then came towards Morse, grasped his hand with a grip of strength—to which Morse replied by a grip still stronger—and exclaimed—

"And so—hallo!"

Then they went literally and figuratively their different ways.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAMILY DINNER.

"The Family," to use Crichton Kenway's expression, represented in Kooràli's imagination an awful and indefinite quantity, the length, breadth, and depth of which she felt hopeless of gauging.

For some time after her arrival in England she was bewildered by the fact that the family were not Kenways at all. The only Kenways besides themselves appeared to be a younger brother of her husband—between whom and Crichton there had been an ill-feeling which now seemed to retard their affectionate meeting—and his wife, a Sheffield heiress, whom he had lately married, and concerning whose manners and parentage dark hints and ominous presages circulated. These apparently were not included in the family.

To be sure, there was Mrs. Kenway, Crichton's mother, who lived with a companion in a street near Bryanston Square; but she was an old lady with a chronic malady, which had slightly impaired her wits. Her limp personality was not held in much account even by her son; and this seemed a little hard, considering that but for her the family, in relation to the Kenways, would have had no existence.

For Mrs. Kenway had been a Miss Nevile-Beauchamp, who it was understood had lowered herself ever so much by marrying a man of no county status or connection with the aristocracy. The Kenways, it may be set forth as a matter of fact, had not owned the Grey Manor from time immemorial, as Crichton Kenway would have liked every one to believe. The Grey Manor had in reality belonged to a family extinct half a century ago, and one Kenway, a London merchant, had bought both manor and ancestry, but had unfortunately only been able to keep the latter.

The elder branch of the Nevile-Beauchamps, on the other hand, claimed kindred with an historic marquisate. The present marquis

was a long off from the younger branches. There were a good many gradations of lords by courtesy, and honourables, before he could be got at. Still, there he was, an undoubted fact. He was a Catholic; and this section of the Nevile-Beauchamps in which the Kenways were merged had in it a strong Catholic element. Mrs. Kenway, senior, had been one of many brothers and sisters. The women, it was curious to observe, were more essentially Nevile-Beauchamps than the men. These had married and brought in collateral relations, so that it was no wonder if Kooràli did not at once get to the bottom of the family. Some of them had married Protestants, with country estates and fat livings, and had made a compromise in the matter of religion; but they had nevertheless kept some of the exclusiveness and narrow culture which belongs to the English Catholic by birth. No member was supposed to take any important step in life except for general family interests and with the full concurrence of the family. This having been obtained, the case admitted of no further question. The Nevile-Beauchamps had a constitution of their own, and new laws could be passed, or old ones amended, by a majority. To make an undignified comparison, "We and the World" might have been chosen as their motto, as in the case of a certain hen in one of Hans Andersen's stories. No phalanx could have been more compact, no circle rounder. Kooràli had not yet been made a part of the phalanx or admitted into the circle. The Nevile-Beauchamps discouraged alliances outside the county families. They thought that Crichton would have done well to wait, and choose a wife in England. He might become a rising man when he ceased to be Agent-General. The colonies they considered rather vulgar. They discovered that Kooràli had been married without settlements. A woman with a father who had not insisted upon settlements must certainly be incapable of appreciating the serious responsibilities of life. It was within the bounds of possibility that she and her boys might fall a burden on the family. The family, therefore, had better be wary in its advances. A woman who had a way of sitting absolutely silent when Conservative politics were being discussed must be an idiot. The Nevile-Beauchamps were Tories of the rabidly personal kind. They had no scruples in declaring that Mr. Gladstone ought to be hanged, that Mr. Chamberlain deserved quartering as well, and that nothing short of burning at the stake was adequate punishment for the Home Rulers. Kooràli sometimes in her dreamy way fancied that there might be a case on the other side. But that was her odd fashion; she saw two sides to every question.

A woman who never looked into the Almanack de Gotha or the Peerage, who did not warm into enthusiasm over the domestic virtues of the sovereign, who had no notion of working in crewels or painting on china, who cared nothing about the class distinction between upper and lower servants, between townsfolk and county people; to whom church preferment, tenants' rights, kettledrums, game laws, social precedence, and Debrett, were all dark mysteries; such a woman must

surely hide beneath a gentle exterior something dangerous and antagonistic to all that was most holy and orthodox.

Thus it was that at first Kooràli had been welcomed rather tentatively; and it was not till the bride, Mrs. Eustace Kenway, appeared on the scene that a series of dinner-parties were organized. At the second of these Mrs. Eustace characteristically refused the first—the two sisters-in-law met. This happened on the night of that very day on which Morse had called at the Crichton Kenways'. Kooràli was dreaming. She seemed to wake up with a curious, shy smile, when any one spoke to her. She scarcely knew most of the people present, and shrank from the gaze of twenty pairs of clear British eyes. She felt a nervous dread of saying the wrong thing. She had been tutored, and forgot her lesson. At last she took refuge in abstractedness. Yet she had an under-consciousness that Crichton was watching her, and was vexed because she did not make a more startling impression. Kooràli wished a little bitterly that she had been born large and imposing, that she had great blue eyes, massive shoulders, and withes of fair hair, like the biggest of the lady cousins present. The Nevile-Beauchamps were mostly large. Even those with little flesh had height, and nothing about them suggestive of the aërial or the imaginative. There were four aunts, three of them freshly arrived from country estates, to whom, while the guests were assembling, Kooràli was solemnly introduced. They were all well preserved, well dressed, their lace Flemish of fine quality doing duty for fashion of cut in sleeve and bodice; they all had bright, hard, observant eyes, thin practical lips, and mellow dogmatic voices. One knows the type. It is provincial, even when it has a town house and is mated with a baronet and a rent-roll. Lady Canteloupe owned a buxome-looking husband, from whom—it was her glory to declare—she had never, since their union, been separated for a single night. This had been the boast of her two predecessors. It was a family tradition. Miss Nevile-Beauchamp when she married took it upon her shoulders. Lady Canteloupe had once had congestion of the lungs, and a physician had advised a winter in the South. Could Sir John be torn from his shorthorns? No. The Canteloupes never went abroad. The Canteloupe ladies died at home. Lady Canteloupe was true to her adopted traditions; but she got better.

Aunt Ecclesworth was more buxom, but not less severe. There was a faint suggestion of the fox-hunting element about her. Perhaps she had caught it from her husband, who was an M.F.H., and her two daughters good cross-country riders, healthy, vigorous damsels, with no nonsense about them.

Aunt Le Marchant was great apparently at agriculture, and was discussing siloes with a benevolent elderly Mr. Nevile-Beauchamp when Kooràli made her little obeisance.

"Mrs. Crichton Kenway! It's Mrs. Eustace who has the money, and you are the Australian. Yes; I went to see poor Louisa this afternoon, and she explained it to me as well as she could, poor dear.

I have come to town expressly to be near her, and look after her a little. I hope you like England, Mrs. Crichton. Do you have agricultural depression in Australia?"

"We have a good deal of depression," answered Kooràli simply. "It's generally among sheep and cattle."

"Exactly," said Mr. Nevile-Beauchamp, who spoke with a drawl, and always prefaced his remarks with an ejaculation. He turned a close-shaven face, with the bland imperturbable look of a Japanese doll, on Kooràli. "Here it's generally among landlords and glebe-owners."

Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp, who was the host, and had made the introduction, laughed softly, and drew Kooràli on. Mrs. Le Marchant was now in a position to state that the new niece-in-law might be pretty, but was certainly very odd-looking, and had fearfully colonial manners.

"*Her* husband is a Squarson," said Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp, as though he were explaining everything. Kooràli only vaguely wondered what a Squarson might be. She was not familiar with the witticisms of Sydney Smith. Just then a Miss Nevile-Beauchamp accosted her —another aunt, who, however, was unmarried, and liked to be called by her Christian name—appropriately Diana—without a prefix. She had already made Kooràli's acquaintance.

"I was going to call on you to-day," she said; "but I have had so much to do shopping, and the Le Marchants staying; and though it is a great pleasure to have any of the relations with us—we are such a united family—still, taking them up and setting them down, and pictures, and their boys to be entertained, and special services and German Reeds and Maskelyne and Cooke—it all makes *so* much for the carriage. We went to a lecture at the British Museum, this afternoon," continued Miss Diana. "It was on Egyptian antiquities and inscriptions, by a lady. She had got it all up out of books, and all the ancient customs, and the hieroglyphics, and the Pyramids, don't you know. But as she had never been in the country, I thought we might have read it all up for ourselves. And then these dynamitards are going to blow up the British Museum next; and I didn't really think it was worth risking our lives—now, do you?"

Kooràli assented.

Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp approached. She was the hostess—the Kitty of whom Crichton had spoken, who had social ambition, and would like to know Lady Betty Morse. She was a little woman, with a purring voice and cat-like feminine ways. Her face was soft and rather pretty. She dressed trimly in perfect taste, and knew just the right amount of rouge to put on, and just how far her eyebrows and eyelashes might be accentuated. She had a little air of feline dignity and rectitude, and of admirable self-confidence. She went in rather for fads in decoration, pretty devices in lamp shades, a hotch-potch of effects —bulrushes and blue china. She had gained quite a reputation among the Nevile-Beauchamps for originality and the brilliance of her entertainments. If she had not been accepted without reservations

the family might have felt a little scandalized sometimes at the highly respectable samples of the literary, artistic, and theatrical professions to be seen occasionally at her parties. As it was, Kitty was indulged and admired as being "quite unlike anybody else;" and when she gave her dress a little pat, preened her small head, and observed in her staccato manner, with her little emphases here and there, "I do not say that I am an authority, but I think it right *just* to contribute my tiny suggestion," that always settled a mooted point.

"I have a letter for you, dear Diana. I do maintain that I take no responsibility, though I know what it is about—a bazaar in which I am interested. It was sent to me to be posted, and now I can give it to you and get it off my mind."

"A bazaar!" exclaimed Miss Nevile-Beauchamp. "Oh, I hope no one has asked me to do anything. I really cannot. I am far too busy. If it had been for some charity in London—but a coffee-house in the country! Put it in the waste-paper basket, dear—or stay, I may as well keep the unused stamp."

Miss Nevile-Beauchamp carefully detached the stamp, and just then, as Mrs. Kitty was remarking, "It really is too bad of people to keep every one else waiting," Mr. and Mrs. Eustace Kenway were announced.

The heiress got her clothes in Paris, that was evident. Only Worth could have produced so startling an arrangement. The marvellous satin petticoat embroidered in wreaths of gold and silver, cunningly interspersed with humming-birds' plumage; the gorgeous velvet train, the twinkling diamonds, the high-heeled buckled shoes, the humming-bird fan of Palais Royal design, the long gold-embroidered gloves, all these details quite distracted attention for a moment from the face and figure of Mrs. Eustace Kenway herself.

"Oh, what bad style; what very bad style!" murmured Lady Canteloupe.

"Money in the funds—not land," briefly commented the wife of the Squarson.

"Puts one in mind of 'New Men and Old Acres,' or something of that sort," whispered Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp to Kooràli.

But the face, with its clear skin—a little too russet in tint—its open, brown, dog-like eyes, its somewhat blunt features and crop of short dark hair curled closely to the head, was frank, fresh, and taking; and the figure, though it was square and robust, with much roughness of movement and gesture, had a certain British, milkmaid comeliness of its own—the sort of face and figure suited to a linen blouse or flannel boating-dress, which would have seemed at home in a hayfield, on a tennis ground, romping with dogs, or wielding a pair of sculls; but which was singularly out of keeping with Parisian fripperies.

Mrs. Eustace, coming forward with firmly planted feet and squared elbows, like a school-girl in a hurry, made her apologies.

"I am afraid we are b-beastly late," she began. She had the slightest hesitation in her speech, and fought a little with her school-boy slang. "It was all Eustace's fault, though. He won't hurry. I can't make

him hurry. I like to go through life quick—d-double trot. He don't. I'm always ready before him. Ain't I, Jo?"

She appealed, as she shook hands with her hostess, to a dark pretty girl following behind, dressed very quietly in black, who answered meekly—

"Yes, Zen; you are always ready."

The brothers said, "How do you do?" as unemotionally as though they had only been parted a dozen hours. Eustace did not look as though he could be emotional. He was rather after Crichton's pattern, only not so tall, and without his long neck. He was more withered up and neutral-looking. He wore an eye-glass. His clothes, or something about him, gave one the impression that he had lived a good deal in Paris. By the time he had made his new sister's acquaintance the move to dinner began. Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp led the way with Kooràli, and, as a compromise, Eustace Kenway brought up the rear with Mrs. Kitty.

"I met a friend of yours the other night, at Lady Betty Morse's party, Mrs. Eustace," said Crichton Kenway across the table to his sister-in-law. "Lord Arden, I mean."

Mrs. Eustace had just answered the Master of Foxhounds' question whether she liked hunting with the declaration——

"It's the only b-blooming thing I can do." She paused a moment, and there was an odd little change in her voice, as she said, "I don't know Lord Arden well. I shouldn't say he was a friend of mine. I met him in Rome, ever so long ago. My mother took me to Rome. She said it would improve my mind. I did my Peter's and my Vatican, but it didn't improve *me*, not one little bit."

"Now, really!" drawled Mr. Nevile-Beauchamp, who was always a little behind the conversation. "Hunting the only thing you can do! But there *is* something else, Mrs. Eustace? You know how to talk slang."

"Yes," returned Mrs. Eustace imperturbably—"and I know how to slang the people I don't like. I picked it up from the boys. There was an old man living next us, with six boys and not a woman in the house. I learned a great deal from them. Ask Jo."

"Who is Jo?" asked Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp, who was rather enjoying himself between the two Mrs. Kenways. He found Kooràli interesting, and Mrs. Eustace decidedly amusing.

"She is the young lady I brought with me. Her name is Josephine. *You'd* call her Miss Garling, though she is a relation of yours. I found her in a *pension*. She's an orphan, don't you know. Her mother was a Nevile-Beauchamp. You'd all like to suppress her—oh yes, I know, don't tell me! You'd like to suppress *me*—but you can't, Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp—not much! Isn't there any way of shortening your name? It's a name and a-half now."

"You might call me Abraham. That's what I was christened. I don't know that it's much better. I don't want to suppress you, Mrs. Eustace. On the contrary, I'll give you every opportunity to dart up like a Jack-in-the-box, and astonish us all. We are a dull set."

"Well—I should think you were—just a little," returned Mrs. Eustace, impartially surveying the table, "some of you. I expect I shall astonish you. My mother says I astonish every one. She says my manners are dreadful. I tell her it's her fault. She should have blown me up. And she didn't. Nobody ever did."

"It isn't likely that any one will begin to reprimand you now, Mrs. Eustace," gallantly put in old Mr. Nevile-Beauchamp.

"Well, it's nice of you to say that," returned Mrs. Eustace. "You were better up to time then. And now I'm going to talk to you a bit. Do you like dogs? If you do, you must come and stay with me, and I'll show you my street of kennels. I've got twenty-eight at the Priory-by-the-Water."

Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp turned to Kooràli.

"So you've met Arden. He's coming in to-night. He's a queer fellow, but not so queer as his father, Lord Forrest. Arden gets things on the brain. He has temperance and virtue on the brain just now. I knew him in the South Seas, when I was commodore out there. He had Pacific-Isleomania then. Do you know what that is, Mrs. Crichton?"

"Yes," said Kooràli. "In Australia my sitting-room was hung with *tapa*, and my boys had a Kanaka for a nurse."

"It's fatal while it lasts, Pacific-Isleomania. If you want any more *tapa*, I'll give you some to set a new fashion, or to wear at a fancy ball. I found Arden blossomed into a representative of her Majesty—what would that old Jacobite his father have said?—with a seal as big as this plate, and power to make treaties with native princes, which the Government here at home was bound to ratify."

"Did he depose any reigning sovereigns or annex any territory?" asked Kooràli.

"No; happily for Lord Derby. He rummaged about the islands, trying to convert the white reprobates to morality. There's a white man on every island, Mrs. Crichton. I don't know how they got there, but there they are—and the scum of the earth into the bargain. First, the scum of England goes to Botany Bay. Excuse me, if I hurt your feelings. The scum of Botany Bay goes to Fiji. The scum of Fiji goes to Samoa; and from Samoa floats to the islands. It's a long process."

"I'll tell you what's a long process!" exclaimed Mrs. Eustace, "and that is dinner on a fast day. I'm a Catholic, Mrs. Crichton, and I was at a party last night, and forgot to eat my supper before twelve o'clock. I hope you'll give us some supper after twelve to-night, Admiral. I like good things to eat."

The sign was given, and the ladies departed. It was Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp's reception night, and the rooms soon began to fill, so that Kooràli and Zenobia were not long left to the tender mercies of the women of the family. Though the party was supposed to be small and early, it was in reality very crowded, and Kooràli was allowed to sit comparatively unnoticed. This would have annoyed Crichton, had he

been aware of it, but he did not at first perceive her, and was studying the company on his own account.

Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp's parties were amusing, and if her celebrities were for the most part of the second and third rate order, some of them at all events were in the theatrical and artistic set. Politicians and diplomatists did not come to Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp's house, nor was it the resort of the frivolous "smart" set. The court flavour was distinctly wanting. Some actors and actresses, however, who were in society, might be found there; some poets and painters of the Rossetti school; composers and drawing-room singers and reciters, who gave their performances gratis, and were not herded like goats among sheep, but chattered in broken French and Italian, and gave a sort of life to the entertainment. Crichton Kenway, not yet very well versed in the intricacies of London society, wandered about making observations. Comparing this assemblage with that at Lady Betty Morse's house, he came to the conclusion that though it was his fixed intention to shine in the highest sphere, this one was on the whole more enjoyable, and not to be despised, seeing that it offered facilities for gaining the ear of society journalists, for securing admission to studios and private views, and perhaps getting a glimpse at an artist's pretty model now and then; perhaps receiving an invitation for Kooràli to sit for her portrait to a Royal Academician. He had learned that there was one present.

Miss Jo had communicated the fact. He found that, in spite of her demure look and recent residence in a foreign *pension*, to say nothing of her being one of the family, she was a very well-informed young lady as to the ins and outs of London life. She knew who every one was, and commented upon each in a quiet little voice.

"They are nearly all Bohemians here," she said; but they are all awfully proper Bohemians. They are very particular. Some of them get married twice over, to make sure. Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp wouldn't have any that weren't strictly proper. I think some of the improper ones are more interesting, don't you?"

Kenway assented with a man-of-the-world air; but he thought to himself that he would set Lady Canteloupe on Jo, for she was hardly a credit to the family.

"Like the people in 'Claire,'" continued the young lady, naming a novel which was not considered food for babes and sucklings. "There's the man who wrote 'Claire.' He's like his books, there's a bad taste about him, but I think he's perfectly splendid. He's mashed on Mrs. Melville, the actress—who makes you laugh so in 'Barefaced'—don't you know? She doesn't make you laugh much off the stage; she is rather stupid. A great many of them are. Now we must stop, I suppose, because Gallup is going to fool for a bit."

When Mr. Gallup, the comic singer, had "fooled for a bit," as Miss Jo and her patroness Zen expressed it, another comedian stood up, and, after making a few faces, made a speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I am accustomed to sing on the stage, and retreat by the wings to this sort of sound," and he feebly

clapped his hands. "I don't see any wings, and I don't hear any clapping, so I shall sit down again."

Every one applauded this as being extremely witty.

Afterwards, an æsthetic young lady, in a red gown with a sacque, played the zither. People began to move about more, and Crichton lost Miss Jo. There was nothing for him to do but listen to the scraps of conversation, which were principally of the artistic shop kind. Crichton felt rather out of it, but decided that he was quite superior to this kind of company.

He heard a wild-looking lady remarking plaintively, "Oh, I'm never at home on Saturday afternoons, I'm always hunting after engagements at matinées."

A little further on, a young man who looked hardly equal to the exertion of carrying his opera hat, was delivering himself of the statements, "Well, Zola is out of fashion now; he is quite Philistine and behind the time. Our school is infinitely more realistic than Zola. We would show life as it is, if only we could get our works published." While another young man remarked mournfully, "Publishers want suppressing."

"And managers," put in a third gentleman, whom Crichton inferred to be a writer of plays.

Mrs. Eustace meanwhile had sought her sister-in-law, to whom she had in her impulsive way taken a fancy.

"I mean to come and have lunch with you one day," she said abruptly.

"I shall be very glad," answered Kooràli shyly. "What day will you come?" She took courage, and spoke more eagerly.

"I wonder if you'll tumble to me," continued Mrs. Eustace reflectively. There was something wilful in her eyes as she looked into Kooràli's face. She began drawing on one of her long French gloves. "Oh, I hate putting my fat pads into coverings!" she exclaimed interjectionally. "I don't expect you'll like me; Eustace's people don't. Eustace thinks I have very bad manners, only he is too polite to say so. Is your husband polite?"

"I suppose so," faltered Kooràli, startled by the abruptness of the question.

"I never saw him before to-night, you know. I don't know whether I want to see him again to-morrow. I want to see *you* though. He has an appointment, hasn't he?"

"He is Agent-General for South Britain," replied Kooràli.

"It takes a lot of cleverness to get an appointment like that, don't it? He looks as if he knew that. I say!—he doesn't want to let one know that he thinks no end of himself, but he does, all the same. He's got his eye on us now. I should just say he was weighing us in a pair of scales, shouldn't you? You've got the b-beauty, you know, and the —the rest of it—manners, and all that—and I've got the shekels."

"Oh!" exclaimed Kooràli, drawn from her reserve by this childlike frankness, "I wish it were so. I don't always know what to say. I'm so shy. It's all strange. I don't know what is expected of one."

"Well, I dare say that'll wear off,' observed Mrs. Eustace, complacently unfurling her fan. "My mother thinks I'm horrid," she pursued; "but I don't much mind that, for she is horrid herself."

"Your mother!" repeated Kooràli, in wonder.

"She is not my real mother, she is my stepmother. I don't mind telling you that she is awfully bad form, very v-vulgar. Lord bless you, even *I* can see that. She always let me do any blessed thing I pleased, and have just whatever I howled for, and that was the only good thing about her. Not that it was so very good either. My jolly old guardians said she had a beastly bad effect upon me. My guardians wanted to get me away from her. My guardians wanted to get rid of the responsibility, and so they bothered me into marrying. I didn't want to marry. I wanted to have some fun out of life first. I think its awfully slow to be married."

"My dear Mrs. Eustace, what terrible sentiments for a bride," said Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp, perching herself gracefully upon an early-English settee beside the sisters-in-law. "You must forgive me for admiring the embroidery on your dress. It is quite magnificent."

"Yes, I like it. I think it's pretty smart," said the bride, in her odd blunt way, stroking the gorgeous wreaths with a most simple satisfaction. "A Frenchman designed it for me. He died just afterwards. I sent him a wreath for his coffin."

Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp moved off to receive some entering guests. "I don't like Kitty—much," announced Mrs. Eustace. "She asked me to call her Kitty. May I call you by your name? It's a funny one, ain't it?"

"Kooràli."

"Kooràli!" she repeated. "And mine's Zenobia. I don't know why they gave it me. What does it mean? It's too showy for my style, ain't it? But most people call me Zen. It's shorter."

"I am sure that we shall be good friends, Zen," said Kooràli.

"Well, anyhow, we can stand up together against the old bounders—I mean the family," said Zen, with an odd little twist of her head that set all her diamonds twinkling. "But you don't know anything about me yet."

"Yes, I do," replied Kooràli. "Lord Arden told me something about you; and he said that I should like you very much."

Zenobia let her fan fall, and turned her eyes full upon Kooràli.

"Tell me exactly what he said," she commanded.

"He said that you were frank and unaffected, and that you had not been spoiled."

"He'd better not ask the jolly old guardians, or Eustace. Anything else?"

"No—at least, nothing very particular."

"Come, there was! There *was* something else. Tell it me—quick."

Kooràli smiled, and said reluctantly, "Only that you had scraped the Priory."

Mrs. Eustace stared.

"Well; it wanted cleaning. *I* don't like to see a house covered with green mould, and grass growing on the tops of the walls. Clean, clean; I want every thing clean, don't you know. And perhaps you'll not mind my being imperious. Eustace says I'm imperious;—it's his word. I don't see how I could help it. Of course I mean to have my own way. What's the good of living at all if one don't get one's own way?"

There flashed through Kooràli's mind something Morse had said to her. She remembered when she had been young, like Zen, and had expected to have everything her own way. She met suddenly Zen's wistful glance, which was somehow in contradiction with all the rest of her. In spite of her off-hand manner, Zen had a watchful observant look, as though she were feeling her way.

"I wish you'd tell me what you are thinking," she said; and went on without waiting for a reply. "I always like to turn people inside out. When I'm talking fastest, I am always thinking most." Zenobia's eyes were at that moment fixed upon the door. Lord Arden had entered, and was shaking hands with his hostess. "Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp is a c-cat," continued Zenobia. "She wants to manage me. I'd like to see her do it! I don't go in for being managed. She is very clever. She is so clever that one is obliged to notice it. The cleverest people are the ones who make you believe they are stupid. Ain't that so, Lord Arden?" she added abruptly, addressing Lord Arden, who had at once made his way to them.

Zenobia held out her hand, her face beaming. It was evident that she was glad to see him.

Lord Arden talked to Zenobia for a few minutes, and then some chance turn in the conversation drew Kooràli into it. Something or other brought up the subject of colonial populations and subject races, whereon Lord Arden was strong, being filled with the principles of the Aborigines' Protection Society and Mr. F. W. Chesson. Lord Arden began giving out his views in a deprecatory sort of way; and only because Kooràli asked for them. He expected probably to find in Mrs. Kenway, the daughter of a colonial prime minister, a shrill feminine representative of the views of the old-fashioned colonist, who held that the soil of the colonies was given to him by providential decree to hold for him and his heirs for ever, and that the aborigines were put into his hands by divine design, in order that through his energetic agency they might be improved off the face of all creation when they had ceased to be of any further use to him. Lord Arden was much surprised to find that Kooràli went far indeed with his ideas, and was full of sympathy with the natives and of anger against the utter selfishness of some of the colonists. From one topic they passed on to another, until Kooràli found herself talking with eagerness, animation, and even volubility. The young philanthropist was fairly charmed with her; and before half an hour it came to this, that Lord Arden was gravely consulting Kooràli on some question con-

nected with the South Sea Islands; was eagerly interposing, "but then, Mrs. Kenway, is it your opinion?" or "what I was particularly anxious to have your ideas about, Mrs. Kenway, was this;" until Zenobia's breath was fairly taken away.

"My goodness," she said at last, when a pause came in the conversation—a pause which she knew would most certainly be filled up at once if she did not strike in—"you are a pair to talk! Why, Kooràli, you do take me off my feet. To think of your knowing all about these things, and being so clever! Who would have thought it of a delicate little shrinking thing like you? Why, I didn't suppose you could say boh to a goose!"

"You were wrong, you see; she can say boh to *me*," Lord Arden said, with a smile. "She has said boh to some of my choicest theories very effectively, I can assure you."

"Has she really?" Zenobia asked innocently. "Well, my dear, it strikes me that, though there are only two of us, the family won't get much change out of us two. I say, shan't we just give them fits, you and me? I suppose it's 'you and I,' Lord Arden ain't it? But I never could quite make out, and it sounds funny, don't it—that 'I' standing all alone at the end of a sentence?"

"Like the criminal in the dock," Arden said gravely, "when the judge has finished the words of doom."

"Yes; that's it, now," Zenobia said simply. But to think of you two taking so much interest in the affairs of other folks, and foreigners, and niggers, and all that lot! Why, I was never taught to take the least little bit of interest in any mortal thing but my own concerns. Yes; I have been jolly badly brought up," Zenobia went on reflectively, looking straight before her with the wistful yet alert expression in her brown eyes; "that gets more and more clear to me as I go on and meet people. Kooràli, my dear thing, won't you teach me to think about niggers and people as well as myself? Lord Arden, will you—like ever such a good chap, I wish you would—show me how I am to think about my fellow-man sometimes? After I have done up the Priory," she added. "I haven't time just now. It takes a lot of thinking when you're lining your rooms with plush; and you want it dyed to suit your complexion."

"I hope you will think about me sometimes, as one fellow-man," Lord Arden said gallantly.

"Oh, that I shall!" Zenobia replied, with a certain innocent fervour in her tone. It was beginning to be faintly borne in upon her that there were other objects of interest to human beings in this world than gowns embroidered with humming-birds, and the furniture and trappings of a rich woman's house.

Just then Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp brought up a Grosvenor Gallery painter, and introduced him to Mrs. Eustace Kenway—to the annoyance of Crichton, who had been watching the little group. Zenobia accepted the painter's arm and his invitation to go downstairs. He being of the Burne Jones school, cast a startled glance at her

gorgeous draperies as she rose, but Zen straightened her feather-trimmed train with childlike satisfaction.

"Mrs. Kenway," said Lord Arden, "won't you come and have some tea or something?"

Kooràli rose. There was a little block just in front of them. A young actress, to whom Crichton had a moment before been introduced, was making play with her large bistre-shaded eyes, and trying to keep two or three admirers in tow at once. Kooràli watched her with a wondering look, and Lord Arden watched Kooràli. The actress was very pretty and taking, after her type, but it was a type which bewildered Kooràli a little. She had gold-powdered hair meeting her brows, with big black eyes, and a melodramatic manner which she was exercising now on Crichton.

"Mr. Kenway, here is Signor Charqui tragically imploring me to take him down, because he has to go home and write an opera, and his doctor says he will die unless he has plenty of stimulants. And here is Mr. Foxwell declaring that he also is dying to get me some jelly, and that the completion of his Academy picture is in question. What am I to do? Mr. Foxwell expiring for me, and Signor Charqui for want of stimulants! I must leave them to die together," and she put her hand within Crichton's arm.

Lord Arden and Kooràli moved on.

"It is a little perplexing for you," said he, with a laugh, "to see people you only know across the footlights dressed like the rest of the world."

"I suppose they are like the rest of the world," said Kooràli.

"Anyhow, they mean you to think so," he replied. "When you are introduced to the fair Miss Mauleverer, Mrs. Kenway, you must avoid anything remotely professional. You must ask her if she was in the Park this morning, and if she went to Lady So-and-So's party last night, though you know that according to physical laws she must have been at the Burlington Theatre."

As they came out of the supper-room, Kenway made his way to his wife. He had given Miss Mauleverer up to Mr. Gallup, the comedian, and those two, with the lady who hunted at matinées and the young man who was more realistic than Zola, formed a little knot at the bottom of the stairs.

"The social status of the actor," Mr. Gallup was saying—"the social status of the actor may be summed up in one word—Houp!" and he executed an acrobatic bound and a series of funny grimaces.

"Come along," said Kenway, touching Kooràli—she had got separated for a moment from Arden—"we will get away from all this infernal rot." Then, seeing Lord Arden, he made an elaborate little speech about his wife's delicate health and the bore of having to go to two or three places in an evening.

"Good night," said Arden. "I shall see you soon again, Mrs. Kenway, at Lady Betty Morse's. She has promised to ask me to meet you at another Sunday dinner."

Kenway was pleased that the bystanders should know that he dined at the Morses'. He bade Arden good night with cordiality.

"That man is a cad," thought Arden to himself, as they moved off; "and I shouldn't think she liked it, poor little thing!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE "LANGUOROUS TROPIC FLOWER."

Crichton Kenway had passed through three several stages of feeling with regard to his wife's position in London society. When they were on the way to England, and for the first few days of their stay, he felt convinced that he was the happy possessor of a wife who was destined to become a star of the London season and of many seasons. After the party at Lady Betty's, which was really their first appearance in what could be called society, he fell into a condition of profound disappointment. He was convinced that Koorâli was a dead failure, a hopeless failure; and he was wroth with her and almost hated her. She became transfigured in his eyes. Her very face, her very figure, did not seem the same to him. Up to that time, in his Sultan-like fashion, he had been delighted to feast his eyes on the beauty of her face and her form. Even when she annoyed him, he regarded her much in the light of a horse, a dog, a picture, some chattel which belonged to him, and might be either scolded, admired, or simply ignored as the mood took him. After that he began to wonder where he could have seen charm of feature, or figure, or movement in her. She was so shy, he thought; she looked so awkward; she did not dress well; she did not wear her clothes well; smart dresses would not seem smart if put on by her. Then came the third stage. Kenway did not quite understand society in London; Lady Betty did. Lady Betty had said that Koorâli would be a great success, and Lady Betty was right; for she knew her world and her people. She knew that the very novelty of Koorâli's shy ways, her little bursts of a sort of intellectual aggressiveness, which was only shyness taking another form, her half-dreamy poetic sympathies and fancies, which Lady Betty perceived from the outside though she did not understand them, her originality, her utter lack of affectation—Lady Betty had seen at once that peculiarities such as these, when combined with a graceful figure and a singularly pretty and picturesque face, would tell on London society. And in truth, they did tell. Before Koorâli had been many weeks going about in society, there were found pretty languishing girls who tried to walk, and stand, and lean, and use their eyes, and move their hands after what they conceived to be the pattern of the young Australian married woman that all the world was talking of. This was Kenway's third experience. He was not yet over his anger and disappointment at her social failure, when he had to change his ideas all round once more, and to wonder and delight over her social success.

Yes; there was no mistake about it. The reality could not be ignored merely because it was a pleasant and unexpected reality; he was the lawful owner of the successful beauty of the London season.

Kenway was especially interested in observing the manner in which Sandham Morse took to Kooràli. He was pleased to see how much Morse evidently liked her. Crichton Kenway was not a martyr to fits of jealousy. He had a placid faith in his wife. He did not believe she had one drop of passionate emotion in her; he felt sure that no temptation in the world could induce her to do wrong. He did not particularly admire her for this; she wanted blood, he thought. She had not "go" enough in her to care for love-making and that sort of thing. In some ways it was very lucky for him that she was cast in such a mould; at any rate, it relieved him from all apprehension. He could trust her where other men could not trust their wives; that is to say, he could make use of her where other men could not make use of their wives.

It was clear to him that Morse was the rising man in English politics; and he meant to rise with Morse. It was clear to him that a time was coming, was close at hand, would come after the next general election, when the democratic party must get a chance; and with that time would come Morse, as Prime Minister, or, at the very least, as leader of the House of Commons, with some noble figure-head in the House of Lords to be set up for the nominal part of Premier. Then Kenway wanted to get some permanent appointment. His recent London experiences made him now rather scorn the colonial governorship which had at first been the object of his desires. He had not the means to go into Parliament, although he had some ambition of that kind. He wanted a secure place, with so many thousands a year, and the admission into good society. He wanted to be certain of a handsome income; to live well; to have no more debts; to dine out every evening in the season at good houses; to make a round of visits at castles and country seats during the recess; to know every one in society; to be consulted by every one; to be in the thick of everything, and to snub the Family and make them wild with envy. Now, all this could be assured to him by a permanent appointment in the Colonial Office, and this he intended that Morse should get for him. He began to think that Kooràli might be of inestimable service to him, provided she did not indignantly revolt at this sort of intrigue; and he therefore saw with peculiar gratification that Morse seemed to like her more and more every day. Kenway never could talk to her much now; they had hardly anything in common. When she and Morse sat together they seemed never to want for subjects of conversation. Secretly, this incensed him, and at times he almost hated Morse—not from jealousy, but from a sense of inferiority. Then he reflected that even a statesman, when he wishes to gain the favour of a pretty woman, must unbend and make her believe she is his intellectual equal. A husband's position naturally releases him from the necessity for such affectations.

He was, of course, far too clever and too knowing to consent to figure in society merely as "beauty's husband." Such a position accepted by him would not serve his purpose at all. He meant to make a distinct mark upon society for himself; and he succeeded. He could do a great many things remarkably well, and he had the art of making the most of his accomplishments. He rode splendidly; he knew that when the autumn came on he would be able to show himself a good shot; he was almost a brilliant talker; he knew many countries well, and had a courier-life gift of polyglot conversation. He could give advice on almost any subject; and there was no question on which he could not come to a decision in a moment. Nothing impresses the majority of men more than the capacity to give a judgment on the instant. Solomon himself, if he asked for time to consider a point, would not be half so impressive, so necessary to his friend, so comforting to mankind in general, as some one who gave a wrong opinion, but gave it at once, and with an air of decision. What if the opinion be wrong? Nobody cares after the thing is over; unless, perhaps, the one man who has acted upon the opinion, and he does not always remember whether he did act upon it or on some judgment or impulse of his own. The rest of the world forget all about the matter, and only remember that Crichton Kenway, by Jove, sir, is a man who can tell you off-hand exactly what you ought to do under any given circumstances, by Jove! An uncommonly clever fellow, everybody said.

Yes; Kooràli was a social success. She came upon London society towards the close of a season when there was a sort of reaction against the professional beauty, and people had raved themselves into weariness over the favourite actress. Kooràli's shrinking wild-flower looks and ways—or what Lady Betty called her wild-falcon ways—had a sudden attraction for all who just then were yearning for novelty. Lady Betty had fallen straightway in love with her eyes, her figure, her style generally; and she had set various other great ladies also in admiration of them. A royal prince begged to be enabled to make acquaintance with the Australian visitor; and highly commended, not only her appearance, but her manners and her odd, pretty name. And then, Kooràli's very mode of dressing, so unlike that of regulated and conventional social life, had its charm also.

She first made a sensation at Mr. Whistler's "ten o'clock." Lady Betty shepherded her assiduously, and took care that just the right word should be said about her to just the right people. It was one of Lady Betty's little whims to take up occasionally and make the reputation of some pretty, witty, or charming woman. She did not care for beauties who "ran" as such, and on patriotic grounds she disapproved of the craze for American loveliness. She had thought for some time that the colonials should have a chance, and had tried a little while ago to start the daughter of that great shearer of sheep, Sir Vesey Plympton, and the wife of a possessor of many gold claims, who, however, had been a dead failure. Lady Betty had submitted to a little good-natured chaff on the subject of her "Australian with the nuggets,"

who smelt of Ballarat, and whose startling Worth toilettes had occasioned as much talk as Mrs. Langtry's famous costumes at the Prince's Theatre. Now, Lady Betty was pleased to make it evident that an Australian woman could be charming and original without overdressing, under-dressing, talking strange Antipodean slang, and aggressively suggesting nuggets. She laid some stress upon the fact of Crichton Kenway's modest circumstances, while at the same time she alluded vaguely to his political prestige and his views upon the "annexation of New Guinea, and Lord Derby and federation—a sort of model for the Irish nationalists, don't you know." Lady Betty, in her pretty inconsequent way, addressed a champion of Home Rule, who was too distinctly and nationally humorous to be excluded from a circle which craves amusement, "With our dear princess's husband at the Castle; as he is a German there could not be any ill feeling." Lady Betty was quite taken with the idea, and presented the Home Ruler to Kooràli forthwith. It is not quite certain, however, whether Crichton Kenway would have relished her description of him, could he at the Universe Club have heard it given. Lady Betty caught the attention of the art clique first, as in duty bound to her entertainer; and after Mr. Whistler's lecture, of which in truth our young barbarian understood but little, Kooràli found herself the centre of a group of striking and Mephistophelian figures, and in the novel position of a kind of lightning-conductor diverting the shafts of the leaders of rival schools, of which one might be said to find "Le beau dans l'horrible," and of the other "L'horrible dans le beau." Kooràli felt the whole thing a little bewildering. It was a very curious and representative gathering—rank, fashion, politics, art, literature, medicine, and the stage, hobnobbing joyfully. The house at which the party took place had got the name of Noah's Ark, from the variety of species which were wont to congregate in it. No fitter scene could have been chosen for Kooràli's first success.

Lady Betty was interested on her own account as well. She realized her ambition to make the acquaintance of Doctor Maria Lakeswell Tubbs, and Kooràli was included in the arrangement which ensured the dangling of the skeleton before a select feminine company in Park Lane. Lady Betty began to meditate a physiological crusade, and the enlightenment of her own sex upon the dangers attending tight lacing. She did not allow the artists and the Home Ruler, however, to monopolize her charge too long. Lady Betty knew how to manage things. A duchess, whose eldest son was talked of as the coming governor of a great Australian colony, was sweetly propitiated. Other great ladies were taken in hand in turn. Then an elderly peer, who was also a poet, a story-teller, and an admirer of beauty, asked for an introduction to Kooràli. He told her his latest good thing, laughing a fat chuckle at his own wit. He asked her three times where she lived, and the next day sent a card for an "at home." After him came another literary man, an aged masher, with tiny shrivelled form, thin silvery hair, trembling hands and bleared blue eyes—but a power

in his sphere, a critic whose verdict made or marred a book or a beauty. He was a living volume of scandalous chronicle, dating back to Byron in his prime; descending from the Guiccioli to luxuriant matrons present, at whom he glanced, shaking with impish merriment. "They are so proper now," he murmured, "with their daughters beside them! But the tales I could tell!"

And the tales he did tell! Horror! Kooràli shrank like a wounded fawn. She turned a pale indignant face, to meet Lord Arden's eyes. He had dropped in late. He gave her his arm and took her down to supper. He felt like some knight protecting an innocent maiden.

"I know what Adrian Maybank's conversation is to men," he said; "I can imagine what it might be to women. When he was younger, he became a sort of star in the drawing-rooms; and it was the fashion to smile behind fans at Mr. Maybank's spicy anecdotes. I will tell you what a great woman, who is dead now, once said of him. It will show you that there are queens of womanhood who know how to defend their royalty."

There was a repressed enthusiasm about Lord Arden's way of talking, even when he was inclined to be a little cynical, which made him seem an odd blending of knight-errantry and nineteenth-centuryism.

"This woman had been a singer. She was a genius. The blood of the tragedians flowed in her veins. She was a muse herself. I wish I could describe her to you. She was diamond-eyed; and when roused, she could break into flashing speech. I mean Adelaide Kemble; and I get Carlylesque when she is my subject. I saw her one evening a few years back—she was past her prime, but magnificent still—in a room full of people, clever and fashionable, when Adrian Maybank, his talent, his wit, his social charm were under discussion. She was silent, with her elbow resting upon a table, her chin upon her hand, her eyebrows bent ominously, till appealed to by her hostess. 'And you, Mrs. Sartoris, what is your opinion?' I tell you, it was something beautiful to see the dramatic gesture, the flame from those dark eyes, the Kemble head thrown back; to hear the clear, thrilling voice which spoke slowly and deliberately—'When Adrian Maybank enters a room in which I am, there is but one thing I would say, "Women and boys, leave the court."' That was all, Mrs. Kenway. She went back to her former attitude, but no one seemed very ready then to carry on the praise of Adrian Maybank."

The episode of this introduction did not end here. The next morning Kooràli received from Mr. Maybank a tiny presentation volume of poems which celebrated, in language of old-fashioned free gallantry, the charms of various well-known ladies, to whose initials the poet had, for the stranger's enlightenment, appended in his crabbed handwriting the other letters of their names. Enclosed with the volume was a copy of sparkling *vers de société*, addressed to the fair Australian. They were the last Adrian Maybank ever wrote; for he died suddenly the following day. He had, however, distributed the little poem widely.

Thus was Kooràli made famous; to Morse's vague regret; to Lady Betty's childlike satisfaction; to the envy of Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp; and to the astonishment and alarm of the Family generally, who were convinced that such sudden notoriety could not be consistent with good morals. Some paragraph in a social weekly, and a few indiscriminate rumours penetrating the sacred circle, finally brought about a family conclave, in the course of which Lady Canteloupe gave out the resolution that it was desirable Mrs. Crichton should be snubbed; for Lady Canteloupe was one of those strictly proper ladies who hold the theory that virtue is a tender plant which can only flourish in the domestic forcing-house. Zenobia was not included in the family conclave. She had quite made up her mind that she and Kooràli were pledged to an offensive and defensive alliance against the Family.

"Well!" she said abruptly to Kooràli, when according to her announcement she came to luncheon, "do you feel a little less cheap than when I saw you first—now that you are being turning into a professional beauty? You see, I was right. If I have the money, you have what is higher in the market."

Zenobia often came to call on Kooràli. Crichton shuddered faintly at the sight of her carriage, which he used to notice standing at his door; and he always hoped, on these occasions, that none of his fashionable friends would call at the same time. It was a very magnificent turn-out, with as much gold plating and ornamental chain-work as could be attached to the harness.

"I wonder you don't persuade your wife to drop that style of Lord Mayor's coach," Crichton said once to his brother Eustace.

"Ah!" Eustace had a quiet irritating way of putting his eyeglass in his eye, and languidly answering a question or remark which annoyed him. "It's her money, you know. I suppose she has a right to buy a Lord Mayor's coach if she likes it."

Crichton said no more. He was clever enough to see that Eustace's exaggerated tolerance of his wife's eccentricities concealed a gall. It was very evident that Eustace had married without love, and was ashamed of having done so.

Kooràli did not, as Zenobia herself would have phrased it, "tumble to" her sister-in-law. She was oppressed by Zenobia's exuberant vitality, by her frankness which seemed a want of delicacy, and by her slang and boyish manners. There was almost nothing in common between them except a certain sincerity and love of truth, characteristic of both. Kooràli thought, at first, that Zenobia was vulgar. After a while, she began to feel that the over-dressing and apparent ostentation of wealth were not vulgarity, but were due to the fact that the poor little Sheffield heiress had had no experience of anything else. It all came as naturally to her as the dignity of simplicity comes to others. Then Kooràli saw that Zenobia was making discoveries, that she was not happy, and that she found it hard to adapt her crude, hoydenish, material views of life to the more complex condition of things which her marriage had brought about. There was something

in her attitude which touched Kooràli. She seemed to be always observing and drawing conclusions.

Zenobia observed particularly Kooràli's relations with her husband, and Kenway's way of treating his wife. Crichton, though never absolutely rude or rough, had a rasping, overbearing manner at home, in marked contrast with his manners when abroad—a way of harking upon mean detail, of fault-finding, and of attributing the lowest motive to every action, which often caused Kooràli to wince, destroying her spontaneity and self-confidence, and making her timid and reserved, and less and less a thing of flesh and blood.

Once, when Kenway had left the room, after some irritating discussion on household affairs, Zenobia said, with a touch of bitterness—

"There ought to be a training-school for girls who mean to marry. They should tell us beforehand that we are going to become items—pieces of furniture. If one of us happens to be rich, she is rosewood, gilded; that's all the difference. I sometimes wish I were plain deal, and then, perhaps, Eustace might permit himself to storm at me."

"Should you like to be stormed at, Zen?" asked Kooràli listlessly.

"No, dear, it would be b-beastly. But I should like it better than nagging or being let alone. Not that Eustace nags—he leaves that to Crichton. He is too polite. He only lets me alone. It's a little crushing to find one's lover asleep when one has been making tender speeches to him. Eustace went to sleep regularly in the train on our honeymoon. He tried to keep awake, but he couldn't. He was too polite to begin reading all at once; now he doesn't make any b-bones about that. He buys French novels; and then I want to box his ears and say, d-a-m-n—so there!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Kooràli suddenly, with a passion that surprised herself. "To be let alone is just the one good thing in life one may not have."

At that moment Lance, the child, came running in with his hat in his hand.

"Aunt Zen, Uncle Eustace is waiting in the carriage, and he says he wants you."

"Tell Uncle Eustace I'm not a spaniel," said Zenobia; but she said good-bye to Kooràli and went.

Zenobia sometimes met Lord Arden at Kooràli's house; and she threw herself with enthusiasm into his schemes of philanthropic reform. He was at this time much interested in a plan for providing homes and places of recreation for young workwomen. Zenobia listened to him one day, and the next sent him a cheque for a large sum which she begged might be used at his discretion. Her impulsive generosity somewhat embarrassed Lord Arden, and also her eagerly expressed wish to have an active share in the work. Mrs. Eustace Kenway, in her French dresses, with her gorgeous carriage and powdered footmen, seemed incongruous among the workwomen. But he had taken a liking to the good-natured, spoilt child; and he, too, discerned something of that pathetic element below the surface which

touched Kooràli. Zenobia was always less brusque, somehow, when he was present. It was at one of his benevolent entertainments that Zenobia first met Lady Betty Morse. She came to be known in Lady Betty's set, as "that dreadful sister-in-law of pretty Mrs. Crichton Kenway;" which was a little hard on poor Zen, though it was but too natural that she should set Lady Betty's teeth on edge. Lady Betty was in some sort a revelation to Mrs. Eustace, who began to have faint glimmerings on the subjects of over-dressing and gold-plated harness. But the glimmerings were very faint, and did not yet broaden to the Priory, for which Zenobia was just now buying the most magnificent modern furniture that Tottenham Court Road could produce.

Kooràli was herself one of the very last to find out her own success; and when she did at last find it out she was much amused, and went into the part as she might into an evening of private theatricals. She did not care in the least about the success, except that it amused her and helped her to escape from thinking of other things. Moreover, it oiled the wheels of domestic life; for Crichton was pleased, and appreciated her in proportion as she was made much of.

A French diplomatist of rank, who sat next to her at dinner one day, paid her many compliments in his own tongue. Kooràli was not listening very attentively, and perhaps had not that perfect mastery of the language which is apparently the natural possession of every heroine of fiction. She heard the diplomatist talking a great deal about a certain "languorous tropic flower;" and she thought he was giving her a description of some new discovery in botany. It was only when she compelled herself to pay a little more attention to his talk, that she found out that she was the languorous tropic flower, and that her neighbour was paying her an elaborate compliment.

"But you know," she quietly said, in as good French as she could command, "Australia is not in the tropics."

"Still, the place you come from is all but tropical. Oh yes, I know," he insisted.

She told him its degree of latitude. The compliment withered under this mode of treatment, even as the tropical flower itself might have fared under a shower of sleet. The diplomatist afterwards gave out that Madame Kenway was witty, but a little, just a little malign, which did not harm Madame Kenway much in society.

Kooràli's success, intensely gratifying to her husband, seemed to him his success, too. In fact it was so. They had three times more invitations to dinner than they could possibly accept; and Kenway positively insisted on their accepting all they could. Kooràli did not mind much; she was as willing to do one thing as another. Perhaps she would rather go out anywhere now, than remain at home a whole evening with her husband. Only two men had much interest for her in all the crowd she used to meet. One was Lord Arden—and she frankly admitted to herself her interest in him; the other, of course, was Morse; and about him she did not admit herself to anything like self-examination—as yet.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TERRACE.

They met very often—Lady Betty's charming patronage of Kooràli and pretty way of "making things nice for her," brought this about most naturally—at Morse's house. Kooràli became quite a feature of the little luncheon parties for which Lady Betty was celebrated, and at which Lady Deveril gathered plentiful "copy." But apart from such occasions, she saw him frequently in her own home. Perhaps Lady Betty was hardly aware of the frequency of these visits, but had she been so, she would have thought nothing of it. It never occurred to Morse either to suppress the fact of his friendship with Kooràli, or to make much of it. He had glided quite naturally into the intimacy, quite naturally into a habit of dropping in at Mrs. Kenway's on his way to the House in the afternoons, and of talking to her, at first vaguely, of his political opinions, his hopes and fears for England, all the "views" which Lady Betty had a fashion of dismissing as being merely picturesque and the proper thing for a Radical statesman. But Kooràli took them seriously, and had a grave way of listening and of looking at him as he talked, and of putting in every now and then a word or two of intelligent sympathy that had a strangely soothing effect upon him.

Exciting questions were coming up. The elections were talked of and the chances of war, which rumbled like thunder in the distance, or like the slow upheaving that heralds an earthquake. In the lull before the storm, the Government was affecting to busy itself with Australian affairs, a safe subject to handle; and the first reading of the Federation Bill, of which Morse had spoken to Kooràli, was to come on. The first note which she ever received from Morse was written from the House of Commons, and in reference to this debate. It gave her a curious thrill of pleasure. No one had ever before written to her from that place. It seemed to revive crude girlish dreams, when she had visions of being a power in unwritten Australian history, and of swaying the councils of public men. She began to feel within her breast a rising up of her old self, her real self, which her marriage had crushed. She seemed to know suddenly that she had resources of intellect and emotion never yet brought out. It was an odd sort of fancy; it frightened her a little.

Morse's note was short, scarcely telling her more than that he would speak the next evening. One little passage at its close, however, touched her, for it seemed to speak of weariness and dejection.

"I am writing to you from one of the lobbies 'upstairs,' as our phrase is here. The debate going on below drags and drones, and I would that I were a travelling tinker, and might wander away through green fields and down by the river with the bulrushes, which somehow I associate with Australia and you."

It had been at first settled that Lady Betty should take Kooràli to the House of Commons, but when the time came, it happened that the debate clashed with a grand fête at the Inventories—almost the last event of the season—a sort of Floral Fair, at which Royalty had graciously consented to hold a stall, and at which Lady Betty Morse was to assist Royalty, attended by the boy Lennie dressed in mediæval page's costume. All the professional beauties, and many beauties who were not professional, would as a matter of course be at the fête. Lady Betty insisted that Kooràli must take her stand amongst them.

Kenway was at first very much annoyed when after luncheon that day she declared her intention of going to the House of Commons instead. She did not at the moment say that Morse was to speak. It was one of Kooràli's faults perhaps, at any rate one of the reasons why she and Kenway did not "get on," that she could never even in a trivial discussion meet him frankly with mind bared, as such a woman would naturally have done had she been sure of sympathetic comprehension. She had a nervous, almost physical dread of being misinterpreted, and shrank from an abrupt word as a timid woman might shrink from an expected blow. This attitude irritated Kenway inexpressibly; and Kooràli felt and owned to herself that he sometimes had reason on his side.

"What an infernal fool you are," he said wrathfully. "You have opportunities made for you which don't fall to the chance of one woman in a million, and you don't know how to take advantage of them. Last night you wouldn't go to the Coulmonts, because you had a headache, or some such rot, and my lord was as gruff as could be. You might remember that this season is a sort of speculation to me. Do you suppose that I should go in for it if I didn't mean to make money out of it? You might consider my interests."

"I don't know how I should be serving your interests by going to the Inventories this evening," said Kooràli. "I should certainly not make any money, and that is what we most need just now."

Crichton got up and stood with his back against the mantelpiece, the picture of angry discontent.

"I am glad you are beginning to realize that," he said in his grating, cynical voice. "As a rule, you take things as coolly as if you had been born a millionaire, instead of—what you were. The fact is, that unless my speculation succeeds, you will not be likely in future to see much of the people you may meet to-night. Every day we are getting deeper into debt. That would not matter much if I had any way of raising money, but I have next to none now. I am sure to lose my appointment before long. In the Australian telegrams to-day, the South Britain Ministry is described as shaky. What shall you do then? How should you like to go back to Australia, or to vegetate down at the Grey Manor?"

Kooràli got up from her seat too.

"Crichton," she said earnestly, "I have told you over and over again that I am willing, anxious, to live in a smaller house and give

up the carriage and all that, or to go to the Grey Manor. You might have rooms near your office; I shouldn't mind, I should like that. But while we are living in this way—so far beyond our means, and making no effort to retrench, the only thing is to try and forget the falseness and hollowness of it all. And so I take things coolly, as you say."

"It would be more to the purpose if you helped me, by making yourself agreeable to Lord Coulmont and people of influence. But you let men drop in the most tactless way—fellows who might be of service to me. You offend them, and do more harm than good."

"You should rather say," answered Kooràli with sarcastic emphasis, "that they offend me."

"My dear, what woman was it, that boasted she had never lost a lover without turning him into a friend? I am afraid you haven't learned that art. All men of the world make love to a pretty woman. You are old enough to take care of yourself. I don't see how it can hurt you if Coulmont, for instance, who will be at the Inventories to-night and on the look-out for you, should make you a few pretty speeches. The man is pleasant—and may be—useful."

Kooràli said not a word. She moved to the writing-table.

"What are you doing?" asked Kenway.

"I am writing a note to Lady Betty Morse to say that I can't be at her stall this evening."

Crichton strode forward. "I must beg that you will change your mind," he said, his tone suggesting intense anger bottled up. He paused suddenly, and added abruptly, "Why are you so anxious to go to the House?"

"Because," replied Kooràli, turning to him with clear eyes, "Mr. Morse is going to speak on the Federation Bill, and he has sent me a note to say that he has got a seat for me in the Ladies' Gallery."

She saw the expression of her husband's face change completely. At the same moment, a rush of crimson dyed her own cheeks, and something seemed to catch her breath and almost to choke her—a swiftly darting thought, sensation, she hardly knew what it was. She turned away her eyes. The china figures on a bracket near were outlined with odd distinctness. It was as though she had never noticed them before. She could not look at Kenway with that consciousness between them. She could not go on with her note. The words "Dear Lady Betty," which she had written, seemed to stand out like letters of fire.

It was only for a few seconds. There came a quick revulsion. Self-wonderment and scorn, and the sense of loyalty to her friend thrust away the suggestion that stung her, and she seemed to be standing at arms, not in her own defence, but in defence of others. She hardly heard her husband's words.

"You are quite right, Kooràli. You ought to go and hear Morse, especially as he wishes it, and it's an Australian subject. I'll square things with Coulmont. He won't think any the worse of you, or of me, because Saudham Morse values your opinion."

Kooràli uttered a little cry, almost of pain.

"Crichton!" she exclaimed, and there was an imploring note in her voice, "you talk in a strange, hard way sometimes, as if you thought nothing mattered about me, or about anything, so long as we get money and are sought after by great people. But you don't mean it? You wouldn't like me to be spoken lightly of, or—or to lose my own self-respect? You can't like this hollowness and mockery, and the jarring there is between us whenever we talk about real things. Oh, Crichton! if you had only been more gentle with me—if you had only understood me better, we shouldn't be such poor companions to each other now!"

"I don't find you a poor companion, Kooràli," said Crichton, half amused, half touched. "You have improved very much since you have been going into society, and have learned how to dress and how to talk. You see now that South Britain isn't the world, and that it's the way of doing things which makes all the difference. As for wishing you to be 'lightly spoken of,' you must surely be aware that I am the last man to allow my name to be dragged in the mire."

Kooràli had stretched out her hands involuntary to him. She drew them back now, and let them fall by her sides.

"As for understanding you," continued Kenway, with a little laugh, "you seem to fancy yourself a sort of Chinese puzzle, that has to be taken to pieces and put together again. That's not my idea of a woman or of marriage. If so, there is something decidedly rotten about the whole thing."

"I quite agree with you, my dear Crichton," said Kooràli, with some spirit, sitting down again and beginning to dash off her note. "There is something decidedly rotten, as you express it, about the whole thing. I fancy that view would commend itself to most men and women who ever think at all about marriage in the abstract."

"Come," said Kenway, going up to her and putting his hand on her shoulder—he did not notice that she winced ever so slightly under his touch—"you need not get savage or go into a forty-eight hours' sulk about nothing. Wish me luck at the bank, rather. I'm going to try and screw an advance out of the manager, and shall have to make up some cock-and-bull excuse for wanting it which won't damage my credit. I think I had better lay it on you, and say we have been sending money out to Australia to your brother. They know he has been nearly cleaned out with the drought, and has had a row with Middlemist. But no, that story won't do; they might try and verify it."

The bank with which Crichton Kenway had dealings was the London branch of an Australian firm. The principal knew Kenway well enough to grant him an overdraft now and then; and hitherto, by some lucky chance, things had always been put straight again. But these accommodations and the friendly footing they were on entitled him, as it were, to ask free questions as to the uses to which the money was to be applied, and the ins and outs generally of Kenway's private affairs, with a view of course to the security of the loan. It was a little diffi-

cult always to wriggle safely out of these inquiries; but Kenway's speciousness served him on such occasions in good stead. He had the rare knack of making out a good case, and of inspiring confidence in his integrity, which had tided him over many a serious crisis. But this was a much more serious crisis than any he had yet had to encounter.

"I shall ask Bonhote to dinner," continued Kenway, taking out his engagement book and looking over it. Bonhote was the manager of the Bank. "I see we are free on Sunday. One can get so much more out of a man over a bottle of Léoville. Remember, if he comes, that you don't say the wrong thing. You have an unhappy knack of doing that, dear, when a little *finesse* is required."

"Oh, do not let us tell lies," cried Koorâli. "I can't bear it. Sometimes, when I hear you making up a plausible tale, I shudder. You would lie even to me, if it served your purpose."

"I wish you wouldn't take things like that," returned Kenway, a little discomposed. "I am only doing my best for you as well as for myself. We are in a hole, and we must get out of it. If I can't persuade the bank to give me another leg-up, I must go to the Jews. Well, good-bye. Go to the House. You'll take the carriage. And get Morse to give you some coffee. Go with him for a walk on the terrace, and make the running with him—in politics, my dear—as for flirtation, I suppose you are both above that—but keep an eye to my interests, and don't shirk being introduced to any fellows worth knowing."

He was leaving the room. At the door Koorâli's voice stopped him.

"Crichton."

"Well?"

"Will you go with me this evening?"

"To the House? No. Why should I? Morse will look after you. I don't care a straw about federation, though, of course, I mustn't let people think so. And then I want to make it all right with Coulmont. It won't do for a Cabinet Minister to fancy you mean to drop him, because he has been foolish enough to admire you."

Kenway laughed again that rasping laugh, which grated so on his wife's nerves. He did not give her time to make any remonstrance, but left the room; and presently she heard the hall door closing with a bang behind him.

Koorâli did not at this time know much about the House of Commons; but she expected somehow that Morse would be waiting to receive her, and that he would put everything right for her. She drove to the door of the Ladies' Gallery in the inner courtyard, and there she did find Morse waiting. He was a little surprised at seeing her alone; but he did not say anything of that to her. She evidently had not thought about the matter, or did not know that ladies do not usually come alone to the House of Commons. He could get Lady Betty to give her a hint some time, he said to himself; and it really did not matter much in any case. So he took Koorâli to her place in the gallery, and in due course of time there came on the motion for the

debate on the second reading of the Australian Federation Bill, and Morse made his speech. It was not a long speech; it did not oppose the measure; it merely warned the young colonies against the responsibilities, political and moral, of a close fellowship and partnership with the old empire. There was a democratic and almost a republican dash about the speech which delighted the little republican from South Britain. Kooràli felt her old enthusiasm revive. Morse's voice was strong, sweet, and penetrating, with a metallic ring in its scornful tone. It thrilled her as no other voice had ever done. Kooràli recalled afterwards to her memory, with a certain shamefacedness, that she found herself trembling with excitement when Morse began to speak.

After his speech, he came to the gallery for Kooràli, and brought her downstairs. He had asked her to come and see the library; but she refused. She had not many minutes left, she said; she wished to get home before it became late.

Now, when the excitement was over, she felt shy and strange. She had a painful consciousness of some hidden meaning in Crichton's words that afternoon, a meaning she might have discovered readily enough had Lord Coulmont or any other man been in question, but which she could not, would not, apply to Morse.

She declined his offer of coffee; and she shrank from introductions to any of his friends. She grew hot as she remembered the change in her husband's manner, and his reference to influential people; hot to think that he had recommended her to "make the running," even in politics, with Morse. When Morse begged her at least to take one turn on the terrace, she hesitated and looked troubled.

"Mrs. Kenway," he said, "why are you in such a hurry to leave us? You are not going anywhere this evening, I know; and your husband is at the Inventories enjoying the Royalties—as much perhaps as Lady Betty," he added with a little laugh.

"Lady Betty——" Kooràli began, and stopped awkwardly. The thought struck her suddenly, how strange it was, that while the husband was almost denouncing monarchy in the House of Commons, the wife should be in devoted attendance upon its future representatives. It seemed to tell of a divergence of aims and interests; it seemed an incongruity. It was sad, she thought, and it deepened in her mind the impression—always there, though sometimes argued against as foolish—of Morse's loneliness. Lady Betty enjoys everything," she added; but the words were obviously not those she had been on the point of uttering.

"And you too?" he said. "Yes, I think you do. Do you know that, in spite of the wear and tear of fashionable life, you look stronger and brighter now than you did when I first saw you in England—at my own house?"

"Yes," she answered simply, "I am happier now."

To him there was something infinitely pathetic in her reply. She was too truthful to hide from him that she had not been happy, that she was not now quite happy. It touched him strangely that she

should not make any flimsy pretence to him. Her sincerity was in harmony with the nature of their relationship to each other. It was an unconscious tribute—not to his vanity, for he was not vain—but to his manliness. And yet she had never knowingly given him the least insight into her married life. Kooràli was so loyal, that not even to her closest friend would she utter one word in disparagement of her husband. Morse had heard her, under stress of social necessity, put on the conventional wifely air, say pretty things implying accord between herself and her husband, and respond outwardly to Crichton's "devoted" manner. All the time he had known it was acting, and had felt intuitively that she knew he saw through such sad, wifely, pious hypocrisy. He had always an impulse to protect her in some fashion, as though she were a child not understood by its parents, and bewildered at being forced into an attitude foreign to its nature. He wanted to take the little thing's hand, as it were, and lead her away, and let her be her own sweet, truthful self. He felt thus at this moment. He could not hold his voice in restraint, though his words were calm:

"No, it doesn't satisfy you," he said. "You don't care for the sort of thing people call 'getting on in society——'"

"Oh," she interrupted impulsively, "the falseness, the seeming to be what we are not—that is what I cannot bear." Then, as if regretting her outburst, she faltered, "I—I mean, Mr. Morse, that we are not like you and Lady Betty—it suits you; it is your right place, but with us—it all seems a mistake somehow."

He looked down upon her. They were on the terrace now. There was no moon, but streams of amber light poured out from the windows of the library. The river, hemmed in there by the Westminster and Lambeth Bridges, looked like a narrow lake edged by brilliant points of fire. These, reflected in the water, gave curious straight bars of light, alternating with broad and dark lines, crossed here and there by the black outline of some heavy barge. A solitary lamp upon the low mast sent out its reflection like a lengthened flambeau till the shining trail was lost in the leaden stillness of the central stream. Further back, on the south side, all seemed dusky in contrast, the great block of St. Thomas's Hospital looked an ill-defined mass dotted with rush-lights, and the grey keep of Lambeth Palace showed solemnly among the shadows when a ripple on the water put out the reflected lights in the river and allowed the objects on the shore a better chance of being seen.

"You have no need to seem anything but what you are," he said very gravely; "for no one who knows you could misunderstand you. But you are right, Mrs. Kenway; it doesn't suit you—this merry-go-round sort of existence. I often think, when I watch you at parties and places, that though you are talking and smiling, and quite in the world, you don't really belong to it; and that you would be better pleased to be with your children, and"—he paused for a moment, and his voice deepened ever so slightly—"with your—I mean in your own home.

She laughed a little jarringly, and her voice trembled too. "I don't

know, Mr. Morse. You mustn't think that I am so domestic as that. I don't think I like staying at home very much."

There was a silence which lasted several paces till they turned again in their walk. Morse had mechanically returned the salutation of a passing member, and exchanged a word or two about his speech that evening. The member glanced at Kooràli and raised his hat. He seemed to wish to prolong the conversation so that an introduction might be effected; but Morse moved on.

"I know what you were thinking a minute or two ago," he said abruptly. "It struck you that Lady Betty would not have approved of my speech to-night."

"Lady Betty does not think that you are in earnest," Kooràli answered.

"But you know that I am very much in earnest," he said gravely.

There was a little silence.

"I wish your words could pierce to the very heart of all our colonies," Kooràli said with emotion. This was her first direct comment on his speech.

"You liked what I said?" he asked her quite seriously and gravely, as if he were talking with a man.

"Oh yes. I felt every word of it; I agreed in every word. That *is* our danger; I have long thought it. We shall become corrupted with this false glory of war. We shall think we are sharers of England's strength and fame when we are only becoming conspirators against justice and mercy. But is it not hard for you to be so impartial, being an Englishman?"

She spoke brightly and without shyness. It was a relief and yet a half-admitted disappointment that they had gone off the more personal ground. To discuss any general subject with Morse was always a great pleasure to her; for even the shortest conversation seemed to reveal new meeting-points, new harmonies. But to know that he took a deep individual interest in her gave her a curious thrill, half of pain, half of delight. She did not analyze the feeling. She shrank from acknowledging it, but she was conscious of it all the same. She was glad when their intercourse was of a bright happy kind, and this was often; for then it was a companionship of mind and temperament such as she had never known before in her life.

"They tell me I am anti-English—the papers do," Morse said, with a smile. "My own fear is that I am rather too much inclined to make an idol of England. I want her to do right."

"Some day you will speak with the voice of England," Kooràli said, her own voice swelling with enthusiasm. "I wonder if I shall be here then; or if we shall have gone back to South Britain, and I shall only read in the papers of all that is going on in England? Well, I shall read with all the more interest because of what I have seen and heard to-night. I shall not forget this."

"I hope you will be here," Morse said, "whatever happens to the political fortunes of us and our parties."

"Yes; I should like to stay in England for a little yet, and see what happens." Then she almost caught up her own words, and hurriedly said, "It is very kind of you, Mr. Morse, to take so much trouble; and I am delighted; and I shall always remember the debate and your speech; and I think I must go now."

"Yes; I suppose you must go," Morse said. "I am so glad we agree on these questions, Mrs. Kenway, and I hope we shall meet again before long. You will allow me to come and see you again some day soon?"

"Oh yes," she answered impulsively; "the sooner the better."

She turned her soft dark eyes with a look of almost childlike confidence up to him—she did seem very childlike in face, form, and expression even still—and then he conducted her through stony courts and draughty passages to her carriage, and she drove away.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SHALL I GO TO SEE HER?"

It must not be supposed that Kooràli, on discovering herself to be uncongenially mated, had sunk at once into the attitude of *femme incomprise*. A bright imaginative girl, accustomed to supremacy, with ideals and aspirations fed by a course of romantic reading, but with no practical knowledge of life or human nature, even of the most limited kind, she had married under stress of girlish sorrow and disappointment, just as a child whom its guardians had deserted might trustingly put its hand into that of some kindly speaking stranger who had offered to take it home. Kooràli had never seriously reflected that she might be making a grave mistake. She was a very ignorant and a very pure-minded girl, and she did not think much about the obligations of marriage, or of marriage itself, except as being, she supposed, the ultimate destiny of all women.

Crichton Kenway, good-looking and well-mannered, with a certain political repute, an assured position that seemed to offer a prop in her loneliness, and an unlimited self-confidence which impressed Kooràli with a sense of security, attracted her fancy, as was natural enough; and he, being very much in love with the Premier's pretty daughter, and making a frank display of apparently good-humoured if somewhat unheroic devotion, would have satisfied a girl less ignorant than Kooràli and with not so strong a craving for sympathy and affection.

They were engaged only for a month or two. She had very little time for self-analysis. Occasionally she felt a faint qualm of doubt as to whether this were the all-absorbing love, the perfect kinship of heart, soul, and spirit, of which in poetic moments she had dreamed; but when she spoke of this to Crichton, he always soothed her with the hackneyed assurance that love in its fullest sense is to a woman an impossibility before marriage. Even at that time Kooràli had

glimmerings of the fact that there was not a great deal of soul in Crichton Kenway. It was not, however, till after she had married him, and hourly familiarity had rubbed away all illusions, that indeed she found out how little he possessed, how shifty was his standard of the right, or even of the becoming, how self-interested were his motives, how material his views of life. Underneath Kenway's veneer of refinement there was, in fact, a certain grossness, all the more repelling to a sensitive, sincere woman, because in ordinary intercourse he did not allow it to become apparent. He was not vicious, but he was innately coarse. All delicacy of manner and expression, all pretty euphemisms, all poetic veils, he considered as so much of the embroidery of social relationship, so many affectations, very nice in their way, and necessary to the probationary condition; but after the marriage ceremony, superfluous and a sign of weakness in sensible persons.

Crichton roughly plucked his flower, and was surprised and angry that it withered. Or, to use another metaphor, the girl, all tender and sensitive, full of capacities which he might have developed and passionate instincts that he might have turned in whatever direction he pleased, was like a stream frozen at its source.

At first Kooràli was almost too bewildered to realize the position completely. She only knew that marriage shocked and oppressed her. She struggled against the feeling, and fancied that it must come from something unnatural in her own temperament; and she fought very bravely against the nervous horror, the craving to be alone, to belong once more to herself, which made life terrible to her. Often at nights she would lie awake and cry silently, and wonder why she cried—for she could not at first bring herself to admit that her husband's companionship was repugnant to her; she only said to herself that she disliked marriage.

She suffered in health, she grew pale, and was inclined to be hysterical. This annoyed Crichton. He lost his temper. He was able to swear without raising his voice, and to say crude, hard things in a way that hurt like a blow. He frightened her; she was not strong physically. She felt sometimes like a slave who is full of passionate rebellion and dares not strike. She could not swear. She could only keep cold silence, or, as a woman does, say bitter words. Then began the warring over petty matters which is the curse of ill-assorted unions, which is weariness to body and spirit. Kooràli was ignorant. She had never been taught housekeeping. She knew almost nothing of the intricacies of table-serving and such-like matters. Her own people were not what is called "particular." Mr. Middlemist did not much concern himself that his claret should be at exactly the right temperature, or that *pâté de foie gras*, Bombay ducks, and such foreign additions to a purely Australian bill of fare should be provided for him. Crichton Kenway did greatly care about these and other things; and in his estimation, Kooràli, as a wife, fell short in a thousand ways. She did not understand that in an English establish-

ment things were ordered thus, and thus only, and that to transgress the gastronomic code was crime far more heinous than to tell a lie or to commit a mean action. Her pride revolted against Kenway's sarcasms, which seemed intended to remind her of the inferiority of her origin. When she had brought herself into a condition of quiet endurance, or even contempt, which is in some sort a satisfaction, the sense of contest was boring. She felt this fashion of intercourse to be slow starvation of heart and spirit. She learned to please him as a housekeeper, but this did not much mend matters. Kenway in a state of serene content after a dinner which he had enjoyed was to Kooràli no more of a companion than Kenway in a state of wrath. He was one of the husbands who, conscious of having but a limited stock of interest in intellectual subjects, economically keeps whatever store of knowledge he may possess for use outside his domestic circle. He did not like to see his wife read. He liked her to be at his beck and call. He did not care to talk about books, or even about politics, except from the personal point of view. A national question was of no vital interest to him in itself, though in the legislative chamber or at a Government House dinner-party he could enlarge very glibly on the glory and honour of South Britain. He could always be intensely patriotic when that was to his own advantage. But a question as to the possibility of serving himself by means of "back-stairs" influence he felt to be of real importance, and Kooràli's first thrill of repugnance, first bewildered realization of the gulf between them, was caused by her husband's revelation of himself under this aspect.

Kooràli's short married life had been a succession of painful shocks and struggles—vain efforts to reconcile the inward with the outward, the ideal and the real, ending at last in a sort of dazed acquiescence. She had been ill for a long time after the birth of her second boy, and body and mind reacted upon one another. She got into a way of taking life as it came, and of not reasoning about it. She began to believe that she was really stupid and wanting in common sense, as Crichton so often told her, and that he had reasonable cause for complaint. She had almost lost her girlish enthusiasm, her girlish capacity for enjoyment. It often seemed to her that the "Little Queen," the romantic child who had had such firm faith in nobility, goodness, and happiness, had died before her own wedding day. It was all a mistake. Life was cold and colourless. Purity of motive, high aims, love—except the love between mother and child—were all illusions. There were no thrilling emotions, save such as thrilled with pain; and that pain so unheroic, having its springs in what was so poor and mean and petty!

Thus things were, when Kenway, after a short period of comparative impecuniosity and of fighting on the Opposition benches, received the appointment of Agent-General. Middlemist's party came into power, and Middlemist was able to gratify his son-in-law's ambition to visit England, at the expense of South Britain. But Middlemist was tottering, and Kenway knew, when he accepted the Agent-Generalship, that his own tenure of office might be a short one. Any telegraphic

despatch might contain the news of his downfall. He knew already who would be his successor. In that case, failing Morse's patronage and the lucrative English appointment on which he now depended, it was open to him to drag on existence in London or the country as best he might on the small income arising from Australian investments that he could not realize, as he would have liked to do, or to go back again to South Britain, and once more force himself into place. He had calculated risks, and was prepared to play a bold game.

So they had "come home," as the saying is. Only such an entire change of scene and of the circumstances of her life as this was could have aroused Kooràli from the numbed condition into which she had fallen. And the springs had begun to move. She who had fancied that everything was over for her found that her real nature was only coming into play.

Kooràli watched with the closest attention all that she saw passing around her. The England which she was looking on was so like, and so unlike, the England of her dreams, that she hardly knew whether she was pleased or disappointed. In some ways it was disappointing. It seemed to her like a tapestry of which the colours had faded. There was a want of freshness. The society she mingled with appeared to be gracefully outworn. There was a lack of energy, of interest, of sympathy. She felt at first not merely that she was alone in the midst of it, but that every one else seemed alone also. She grew to like Lady Betty. She felt tenderly grateful to her; but she could not open her heart, she thought, to Lady Betty. It appeared to her somehow that if she had anything to say which was long in the telling, Lady Betty would not be able quite to keep up her interest in it. Lady Betty was evidently of a sympathetic nature, but the sympathy had nothing very particular in it; she was able to put herself at once into general sympathy with every one; but it did not get much deeper with one than with another.

Of the men of her circle Kooràli liked Lord Arden perhaps best. She felt already as if she had known him for years. He evidently liked her too, and came to see her whenever he pleased.

Morse she did not class quite with other men. He seemed to belong to her old life—to her dreamy girlhood. In regard to him, it was not a mere question of liking; the sense of companionship with him was too strong. She felt for him the warmest admiration. He had not disappointed her. He was exactly what she would have wished him to be. He was strong, he was brave, he was independent. He had evidently a heart full of generous human feeling. He seemed to Kooràli's enthusiasm a man to lead a state; to lead a nation. She admired his complete self-possession; his undisturbed calmness. The old Napoleonic idea about him came back to her mind now and then; but she did not now think him like Napoleon. He seemed far too unselfish; too much of a patriot. She was in truth quite ready to make a hero of Morse; all the more so as his sweet composed manner towards herself, always friendly and sympathetic, was never demonstra-

tive, and though occasionally he showed her that he in his turn considered her as removed from the crowd, he left her free to think anything she liked about him. She might have been afraid to allow herself to idealize other men; but for Morse it did not matter. She would not let herself think it mattered. He seemed to stand high above women, and apart from them somehow—such at least were Kooràli's ideas—it was nothing more than a sort of duty that a woman should look up to him with admiration. She understood him so well, she thought. He liked her; that was clear. It was a sort of tacit understanding between them that she was to him a link with the past—a past of unfulfilled dreams, perhaps, like her own; and she was gratified by the knowledge. She had been so long misprized in a certain sense, that it was the lifting up of her self-respect again out of the worldly mire when a man like Sandham Morse showed that he felt respect for her.

On the whole Kooràli was now almost happy. She enjoyed the pageant, even when it sometimes disappointed her; though she was galled now and then by the sense of a false position, and this most when in Crichton's company. It was, nevertheless, delightful to her to mix with all these bright clever men and women, and to be accepted as an equal, even regarded as a favourite among them. She had not been so happy before since her marriage. Her husband and she were getting on much better now than had been their way for long before. He left her more alone, though, while she was unaware of it, he watched her closely. He felt that he had struck a wrong chord in their conversation upon the day of the Federation debate; and for the present threw out no more insinuations in regard to Lord Coulmont or other influential admirers. He saw that he had shocked her. This would under ordinary circumstances have given him no uneasiness; but he was careful not to do so further, lest his plans about Morse might receive a check. So things were going smoothly on the whole; and he was less irritable. His debts did not press so heavily upon him. The bank had refused to advance the sum he required, and he had been obliged to have recourse to a money-lender. He had tried to get a loan out of Eustace, who had remained languidly impervious to hints. Zenobia, however, having got an inkling of his embarrassment, sent him in the prettiest manner a cheque for several hundreds. Zenobia said not a word of this to Kooràli, or any one else, nor did Crichton. His manner to his sister-in-law changed very much. He treated her to a style of exuberant friendliness; but the little transaction made no difference in the contempt he expressed for her when his remarks were not likely to reach her ears.

Kooràli thought he was greatly improving; she even began to ask herself generously whether she had not been most in fault all through. Yes; she was almost happy.

Morse's feelings towards Kooràli were curiously compounded. Her intuition concerning them was a true one. They were perfumed by a memory of youth; they had in them the recollection of the "divine

feelings that die in youth's brief morn," as Shelley says. Kooràli's was a living form from a bright time when life was still in its opening for him. Besides this he admired her much. He was in a strange, half-unconscious way in sympathy with her; he was pleased with her frank outspoken confidence in him and admiration for him; and he knew well that she was not happy. Morse was a man of the world, and would have understood, of course, if he had put the question to himself, that it would not do for him to admire this beautiful young Australian woman too much, or to be with her except in the most ordinary and commonplace sort of way. But he had not the least inclination to pay her any marked attention of the kind that society comments upon. He was sincerely anxious to make her time in London as pleasant as possible for her, and he was glad for her sake to court the companionship of her husband. He had a strong idea that they did not get on very well together, and it seemed to him that a woman's respect for her husband is often increased by the respect which others show to him. So Morse was very attentive to Crichton Kenway, whom all the while he did not greatly like. But Kenway had impressed him with a sense of capacity and fitness, and Morse often thought that if ever he got a chance of making such an appointment, Kenway would be a remarkably good man for some permanent place in connection with the colonies.

Is a prudent, well-meaning man, who is no longer young, bound to avoid the company of a married woman the moment he begins to feel any special interest in her, the moment that she seems to take an especial interest in him? Can there be no friendship between a woman and a man? Is it all the "fire and tow" principle in which Crichton Kenway faithfully believed? Morse certainly was not a man to believe naturally in this ignoble doctrine. He had no feeling towards Kooràli, as yet, which might not have been laid bare to Lady Betty, and have had Lady Betty's cordial approval and sympathy. Still, after the evening on the terrace, he had some little doubt now and then as to whether he ought to go and see Kooràli at her house so frequently, even when sometimes Lady Betty suggested the visit. But the chief reason for his doubt was not because he was afraid of falling in love with Kooràli, or of her falling in love with him. About this latter possibility he never thought at all; only he asked himself whether it would be well to get into a habit of calling on Kooràli and to encourage his interest in her, seeing that she might go back to the colonies again, and then he should miss her, and should have put on himself a needless pain. Of course, if her husband could get a permanent appointment, he and she would stay in London. But, then, would it be well to admit that idea into his mind? Would it be well to allow himself to think that a permanent place for Mrs. Kenway's husband would keep Mrs. Kenway in London, and enable him to call and have a talk with her every now and then?

"Shall I go to see her; shall I not go?" Morse was one day asking of himself. Why should he not go? he thought; was it not almost an

offence to her even to hesitate, to raise any question on the subject? She was a dear friend; why allow such profanation to the sincerity and sacredness of their friendship as was implied even in the momentary doubt whether he would not do better by keeping away from her? And yet; and yet——

While he was thinking, something oddly decided for him. Lady Betty brought a young and enthusiastic girl of eighteen, a friend of hers, just come out, to see Morse. Morse had not met her before since she was a child. He had grown to be a great man in her estimation, and was indeed her especial political hero. When they had talked for some time, and she was going, he held out his hand, and the pretty young enthusiast suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, Lady Betty—please—may I kiss him?"

"My dear child, kiss him by all means," Lady Betty replied, much amused and delighted. So the girl kissed him, blushing crimson at her own audacious impulse.

Now, what had this pleasant little incident to do with Kooràli? Just this much. "Come," Morse said to himself, "that settles it. I am no longer anything but an elderly man. He whom pretty girls offer to kiss is beyond the time of scandal. I am growing old. Nothing could make this more clear to my mind than that volunteer kiss. I may go and see any woman; it does not matter now."

CHAPTER XV.

KENWAY ACTS THE HERO.

One morning, a few days before Goodwood, Crichton Kenway came into his wife's room while she was dressing. She had risen rather late after a ball. He was pale with anger and anxiety. He held a newspaper in his hand, and without preface or comment, except a low muttered oath, read aloud a telegram from Australia. It was to the effect that the legislative chamber of South Britain had passed a vote of want of confidence in the Middlemist Government, that Mr. Middlemist had resigned, and that Sir James Burgess, chief of the Opposition and of the anti-squatting party, had formed a Ministry.

Crichton's calmness did not last long. Kooràli had presently to listen to a low torrent of irrational abuse directed against her father, who "might have held on a little longer:" against Australian corrupt practices, against corrupt English practices, against democracy abroad and conservatism at home, against the tardy elections, jingoism, Morse.

Kooràli's face whitened. It has been said that Crichton Kenway could swear so as to hit hard without lifting his voice.

"What has Mr. Morse to do with it?" she asked, her spirit rising.

"Just this, as you know very well, only it suits you to play the 'defile me not' part. He has promised me an appointment if he comes into power; and my future—and yours—depends upon how he

swims with the tide—upon whether he becomes Prime Minister or not."

"He will not swim with the tide," Kooràli answered, her eyes giving out a proud little flash. "He will breast it."

"You think so?" exclaimed Crichton in a different tone. "He talks to you of his prospects—of what is going on behind the scenes. I know that he often writes to you from the House. You can give a guess as to his chances of coming in? He believes himself safe, then?"

Kooràli looked at her husband with the faintest expression of contempt on her face. It was mingled with vague alarm.

"I don't understand you, Crichton. It pains me to hear you speak in that way, for you cannot really mean it. I am very sorry that you are so distressed and angry. I know that it is a serious matter for us; but for a long time we have had to face the thought of it; we knew that it was coming."

"It has come at a confoundedly inconvenient time," returned Kenway. "Three months hence it would have mattered less. How are we to carry on now? I can tell you that your London life has come to an end."

"We might live at the Grey Manor," said Kooràli. "It could not cost so much there, and we have still our own money—from Australia."

"Which will go a long way—in paying interest to the Jews—in keeping up a staff of servants, hunters, and all that. You don't suppose that I am going to live like a beggarly parson, within two miles of my younger brother and—the family estate—driving a one-horse trap, with a parlour-maid to wait, and a groom taken out of the cabbage garden?"

Kooràli was silent.

"Well," said Kenway, "you haven't answered my question. I have a strong notion that you know something of Morse's plans. Does he consider himself safe?"

"Safe?" Kooràli echoed. "I don't know what you are aiming at, Crichton. I don't think I want to know. Mr. Morse must always be safe, for he will never act against his convictions of what is right and best for England, I am sure of that. As for his chance of being Prime Minister, how should I know what he thinks? He does talk to me sometimes of politics—I am proud that he does not think me too stupid to sympathize with his aims—but not in that sort of personal way. What does office matter to him? And if he did tell me the secrets of his party, should I be likely to betray them, even to my husband?" There was an amount of scorn in Kooràli's tone. "Mr. Morse will not join the war party because *we* wish to stay in England, or because he has promised you an appointment if he gets into power. But I can't quite think that is so." Her eyes met Kenway's steadily. "*Has* he promised you an appointment, Crichton?"

"It is an understanding," replied Crichton sullenly. "You are a fool to suppose that public men ever commit themselves. A word or two conveys a great deal. Such things are generally understood."

Kooràli did not answer. She got up from where she had been seated before the toilet table. She had dismissed her maid upon Crichton's entrance, and had gone on herself with the coiling of her hair round her sleek little head. It suddenly struck Crichton that his wife looked particularly well in the soft white cashmere robe she wore, with its delicate frills and trimming of lace. There came into his face a look which she had seen there more than once lately, and which gave her a feeling of repulsion, she knew not why, for she would not let herself try to trace the workings of his mind. She saw the look now, reflected in the glass before her.

"What do you call that thing you've got on?" he said. "A kind of tea-grown, isn't it? Anyhow, it's very becoming. You should wear something like it next time Morse comes to see you. What have I said to shock your sensitive nerves? Ladies wear tea-gowns, don't they?"

Her large dark eyes, full of trouble and indignant appeal, which were turned quickly upon him, startled him. Her lips were quivering, and he saw that she was trembling. A horrible sensation of insecurity, of utter loneliness, of revolt had come over her. She could not command herself.

"Kooràli, what is the matter?" he exclaimed.

She had flung herself upon the sofa at the foot of the bed, and with her arms thrown over the back of the sofa, and her face buried in them, was shaking with suppressed sobs. She did not reply, and the trembling grew more violent. Crichton was a little alarmed. It was not like Kooràli to lose self-control completely.

He went to her and tried to soothe her, showing some genuine anxiety. "Come, don't give way like this. I didn't mean to frighten you about things. It's a bad look-out for us just now, but we shall pull through all right. The season is over, luckily, and we should go down to the Grey Manor anyhow. And I can't be kicked out till the other man comes. Perhaps by that time Morse will be in, and I shall be a deuced sight better off than if I were hanging at the heels of a colonial Government. Don't cry. I hate it. Haven't you got more pluck?"

His remonstrances brought no answer in words, but her trembling abated a little.

"I know what it is," continued Crichton. "You are hysterical and overdone with all the going out. If you keep quiet for a bit you will be better. Lie down, and let me put a shawl over you."

He awkwardly tried to alter her position. She made a motion of entreaty that he would leave her. He went away with an angry protest. When he came back a little later she was sitting up, and was tolerably composed. She got up as he entered.

"Thank you," she said. "I am better now, I am sorry to have made a scene. It isn't my way, is it? But you are right; I am overdone with too much going out. I shall be myself again presently."

She made no allusion to their conversation or to the misfortune

which had befallen them, nor did he. After a few moments he left her again. She heard him calling to Lance, who was his favourite, to come down and amuse him whilst he breakfasted. Lance was to his father something between a poodle and a court jester. And little Miles stole in "to see beautiful mamma dressed." He knew his father did not want him.

When Morse came to see Kooràli that afternoon, he saw that she was anxious and that something had occurred to trouble her. He guessed what it was, for he had read the telegram from South Britain that morning.

He did not say anything about it to Kooràli; he did not know whether she would care to talk about it. He had an instinctive impression that the best way to get a sensitive woman out of a feeling of her own troubles is to tell her of the troubles of others, and he therefore started off at once in a half-jest whole-earnest dissertation on the difficulties that were coming over and clouding his own path in politics. The country was about to be swept away by the war-passion, he told her. No influence, he feared, could stand up against it; but he was going to try his best. He would rather give up public life altogether, he declared, than have anything to do with countenancing or sanctioning this war. But he meant to make a good fight of it before he gave up public life.

"Perhaps if you stay in England some little time longer, Mrs. Kenway, you may see me the most unpopular man in the country."

"But you won't mind that?" she said, with lighting eyes, and forgetting for the moment all about South Britain.

"I shan't like it," Morse replied. "We none of us like to be unpopular; but I shall go on all the same."

"Yes, I know," Kooràli said. "You would go on all the same."

Morse smiled. "Do you know," he said, "that there are people who know me, and pretty well too, and who say that I shall not go on all the same? I have been a very popular man, and I enjoy popularity and power, and I shall perhaps have a great chance soon put in my way——"

"After the elections?"

"Yes; after the elections. I see you are beginning to understand all about our affairs. Quite so; after the elections. Then they say that I will accept my great chances and forget my theories about the war. Some people who know me pretty well say that of me."

She looked at him straightly.

"To know one pretty well is just not to know one at all. I know you won't change."

They were standing near each other. He had risen to go. Impulsively Kooràli put out her hand. He took it in his for a moment.

"Thank you," he said quietly.

Something in his tone made her eyes fall, and she withdrew her hand. She began to fear she had said too much about him, had claimed too much for herself. Just at that moment, however, her husband came in.

Kenway as he entered sent a keen glance at Morse and at her. Then he advanced with elastic step and a sort of cheery defiance in his bright, ever-moving eyes.

"Chucked again!" he said. "You've heard the news, of course? We're out on the world again, Kooràli and I."

"Yes, I have heard the news," Morse said. "I didn't like to speak to Mrs. Kenway about it. I thought perhaps she would rather I didn't. So I have been telling her of my own troubles."

"Oh, Kooràli is a plucky little woman; she won't mind. *I* don't mind. We've been through worse things before, haven't we, girl? I know I have plenty of capacity and courage and all that, and I shall make a way for myself here or there—here, I think. We shall be all right. It's a facer for the moment; but one comes up smiling and ready for another round. People talk of ruin staring them in the face. I have always found that if you only stare boldly back you can put ruin out of countenance. I have done it before, and I mean to do it again. So that's all about *that!*"

Kenway put down on the table a little packet of papers with a determined, business-like air. He placed himself against the chimney-piece, and stood, his long neck upreared, looking at Morse as if ready for any fate. He played his part well, and Morse was impressed.

Kooràli looked up at him with a certain wonder. After all, was there not something brave, manly, admirable about him? She had surely not done him full justice. She found her eyes growing moist at the thought, in the hope that she really could admire him. What did it matter if they lost everything, so long as the very loss itself brought out what was best in him? Was not that to gain and not to lose? "The moment Mr. Morse goes," she said to herself, "I'll kiss him!"

"You take it pluckily," Morse said, with a smile. "But you are really quite right; you have nothing to fear. You have talents, and you have friends. I can speak for one friend, if he should ever have anything in his power."

Kooràli cast a grateful glance at Morse, and then felt a little abashed somehow, and feared she might be misunderstood. Her gratefulness was for Morse's appreciation of her husband's courage and capacity, and not at all for his promise to befriend them. She would rather, somehow, that they fought their battle for themselves, or with the help of some of those on whose friendship Kenway had older and stronger and other claims. And then it struck her that when she had doubted her husband's account of Morse's implied intention to get him an appointment, she had wronged Crichton a little, and she felt still further remorseful.

When Morse was gone, Kooràli was true to her purpose. She went up to Kenway, put her arms round his neck, called him tenderly, "my husband," and kissed him. If at that touching and tender moment in her history Crichton Kenway could only have understood the true meaning of that kiss; of the little it asked for, the much it promised; the meaning of the words that called him her husband, and thus

offered a new and an abiding union of heart and faith and life; if he could have understood what that new offer of a wife's devotion meant; and if he could have appreciated all and accepted all—there would be but little to tell about the rest of these two lives which could interest the reader of fiction. But Kenway looked surprised, incredulous; then returned her kiss with interest, piled up lavishly in numbers and in warmth, until Kooràli actually felt compelled to disengage herself from his arms, and he said—

"Why, Kooràli, I do declare you are a good girl after all, and I do believe you care about me. I do believe we shall get on well together. I declare I feel quite in love with you!"

"Oh, let us get on well together," she said fervently. "I hope and pray that we may; I think we shall, now. I am glad you take all this so well, Crichton."

"Yes; I think I did that well, Kooràli," he said in the tone of a man who begins to feel that he may be confidential. "I think I've got Morse; I am sure of it. There was a stroke of genius in *that*."

"A stroke of genius in what, Crichton?"

"Well, you know, I saw at once that Morse is just the sort of fellow who is greatly taken by pluck and energy and a stout stand-up against fortune and odds and so forth; and I put myself in position accordingly. It took him at once, didn't it?" he asked triumphantly; "and I know I can count on him now. He'll stand by me. He would have cared nothing about me if I had let him see that I was down in the mouth. We shall be all right, Kooràli; you'll see; you'll find."

"I hope so," Kooràli said in a melancholy, faltering tone. The note of distrust was sounded again. "I hope we shall be all right."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"In our lives, I mean; you and I. In our ways to each other; in our feelings," Kooràli explained.

"Oh yes; we shall be all right enough," he said carelessly.

Kooràli's spirits sank; her mind misgave her.

* * * * * * *

The season was drawing to a close. Yet a little, and the light on the pinnacle of the Clock Tower would cease to shine of nights over London. Perhaps there may have been some cynical persons who held that the lantern of the light so soon to be put out was a symbol of the Parliament so soon also to be put out; being showy, far-shining, and empty. London itself might then be compared, by some fanciful person, to the Cyclops in Virgil—

"Monstrum informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum."
"A monster, shapeless, huge, whose light had been put out."

The last Sandown meeting had taken place, and the summer toilettes, their first freshness gone, and the tired look on the faces of their wearers, had somehow given to the crowded slope the appearance of a garden in which the flowers were overblown and drooping. Goodwood was over, too. There was a suggestion of satiety about London

—satiety of pleasure and excitement. Even a nine days' wonder, in the shape of a great fashionable political scandal which was flashed over Europe, failed here to stimulate jaded appetites to any remarkable activity. London—indeed, England—seemed to have drawn a long, deep breath; to be waiting for greater excitement still. All who could leave town had already gone. Some of the great theatres were closed; others were still kept open for apparently no other purpose than to enable aspiring Hamlets from the country and ambitious Juliets from amateur theatricals at the West End to exhibit themselves to select circles of invited friends in the ghastly light of an afternoon performance. Editors of papers were taking their holidays, and carrying, as Emerson says, their giants along with them; in other words, having their newspapers always on their minds, longing to see the newspapers everywhere first thing, and yet dreading to look at the journals because of the possible blunders made in their absence. Fashionable lady novelists, Lady Deveril among them, were seeking fresh breath of inspiration at Cowes and Ryde. Fashionable preachers had gone to preach to select British audiences in foreign cities. Fashionable doctors were off to recruit their jaded and delicate nerves and to talk scandal in the Engadine. The painters were scattering everywhere, from the Crinan Canal to the land of the midnight sun. Later on, those who deal in Oriental subjects, and whose dusky Eastern beauties and Egyptian sunsets, with the picturesque Arab and the lean camel in the foreground, are institutions as fixed as the Royal Academy itself, will be found in lazy dahabeahs on the Nile, or by the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem. Later on, everything will have changed again. The wheel will be turned and the kaleidoscope will have had another shake. But now the interval was one of expectancy and transition. The last sands of the season were running out.

London began to remind one oddly of an old-fashioned illumination in its expiring hour, most of the lamps gone out, and those that still burned flickering faintly into decay. "Ah, surely," says Byron, "nothing dies but something mourns," and no doubt there were hearts that mourned over the dying season. Girls, whose first season it was, mourned over it because they loved the excitement of the balls and parties, and were sorry that the fun was at an end. Girls who had seen many seasons mourned still more bitterly because of the proposals which had not been made, and the sad inexorable lapse of time, and the inward conviction that their friends were counting their years and wondering whether they would never get married, or worse still, wondering whether they would ever get married. Many a member of Parliament lamented the decay of the season, because its close must be followed by the general election, and he knew only too well that an unappreciative constituency would put some other man in his place. Tender sentimental regrets were thrown back on the season by other men and women for other causes, as one throws kindly flowers on a grave. Truly every season is a grave of deep hopes and ambitions, of affections that pined and withered, and of ruined chances; but it is

also green with fresh grass springing up, and gives the promise of new flowers.

Morse was still in town, waiting till Parliament should be dissolved. Lady Betty was not with him—would not be with him for some weeks to come. She was in attendance upon her father, who had been ordered to Homburg, and Lord Germilion's health was perhaps a happy plea for Lady Betty. Homburg was very gay that season. Some of her favourite Royalties were there, and there were to be races of exceptional interest, and, later on, a royal wedding in one of the German capitals.

Crichton Kenway and Kooràli were at the Grey Manor—or rather Kooràli was there, with her children, for Crichton had accepted an invitation to shoot with some bachelor friends in Scotland.

CHAPTER XVI.

"COO-EE!"

The Grey Manor was a quaint old house, part of which had been built in the Tudors' time, and part in that of the Georges. Like most of the old houses in the Midlands, it was built with stone of a wan sort of grey, which had brown veins streaking through it, and patches of reddish lichen clinging here and there, and the oldest part was almost covered with ivy, which spread tendrils across the small mullioned windows—picturesque in themselves, with their queer little panes of thick glass sunk in lead and curious iron hasps and fastenings—and over the tiled weather-stained roof and twisted chimneys. This oldest part consisted mainly of a long low hall, with massive oak doors facing each other, and a row of bedrooms above. When both doors were open, one looked straight through the house from back to front. The Georgian bit was an addition of four lofty rooms, with the tall windows that belonged to that style of architecture, stuck on at right angles to the narrow gabled building and irregular roof-top. The house was quite small, and could hardly pretend to the title of Manor. It had been a manor-house once, but for years and years had been tenanted by generations of farmers, who had cultivated the fields all round it. Now it had been bought by some speculative person in a neighbouring county. A bailiff occupied a cottage near the farm buildings, and the Grey Manor, not sufficiently commodious or well-situated to be rented by a family of means, was usually let as a hunting-box, and as such had been taken by Crichton Kenway.

It stood at the end of a sloping avenue of gnarled and half-dead beeches, on a raised terrace which overlooked a flat stretch of meadows, banked by rising ground. These uplands were laid out in grass and corn, and joined the horizon line, except where it was broken by the tall chimney of an iron foundry and two straight rows of poplars flanking a distant farmhouse. The river Lynde ran flush with its

sedgy banks down the valley—a narrow stream, forking a little higher up, where it was spanned by a huge railway-bridge, and curving and twisting, so that in every part of the meadows some gleam of it might be seen. The view would have seeemed commonplace to an ordinary observer. There was nothing picturesque in the foundry, or the railway bridge with its iron girders, or in the shoemaking town showing along the valley less than a mile off. Yet the landscape had a wildness about it and a variety of aspect which appealed strongly to the poetic mind. In the summer daytime, it was a peaceful English scene, all green grass and waving corn and rippling water, which nevertheless reminded Kooràli of the paddock of an Australian head station, with the farm cattle and sheep browsing close to the house, and the apparent absence of boundaries. But the wind sweeping down the valley in stormy weather had beaten the pollarded willows, dotted in rows here and there, into fantastic shapes. In such weather now they looked like olive trees, with the silvery side of the leaves upward under a wrathful sky. In winter they seemed to resemble a procession of gaunt old crones, with bent and witchlike forms, beseeching alms. The sun set over the town, and then the ugly buildings and smoky chimneys were transfigured by purple and golden light. There were red streaks on the river; the outlines blended in a poetic haze, and a traveller might have fancied he was looking across one of the plains of Argos or Thessaly. Later on, the furnace reddened the sky. Sometimes there was a mist, and then the tops of the willows showed as islands in a white lake, and a passing express flashed above it like a comet leaving its trail of fire.

There were no gardens or shrubbery about the Grey Manor. A stone wall, on which seedlings grew plentifully, closed in on two sides the little square lawn. There was nothing else but the exposed terrace walk, with a natural arbour of yew trees, hundreds of years old, at each end, and a steep grassy bank in which were cut two curious holes that might have been loopholes for mediæval warfare, but were in reality intended to give light to some rambling cellars beneath.

There was, indeed, the tradition of a subterranean passage connecting a winter camp of the Romans, upon which the neighbouring village of Lyndchester stood, with their summer camp beside the river Lynde, on the site of which the Grey Manor was built and the cornfields of the farm flourished. Traces of the Roman encampment still remained, in the shape of a pair of rough-hewn stone coffins standing at the end of the lawn, in which some clumps of sunflowers had either been planted or had sown themselves. The whole place was old-world, and full of impressions and associations. It affected Kooràli most strangely. It deepened her dreamy moods. It was all in harmony with her fancies and yearnings. Sometimes, as she wandered alone by the river, she could almost imagine that she was once more roaming in the Australian bush. She had a curious sense of irresponsibility, as if she knew herself to be a mere straw in the current—a plaything in the hands of destiny. And she had another odd feeling about the place—a sort of

prophetic instinct that it was bound up with her own fate; that a great joy or a great sorrow—she dared not guess which—would befall her there; so that everything about the grey house, every phase of the landscape, the terrace walk, the solemn yews, the shadows and the mists in the valley, the leaping fires of the furnace which she often watched late into the night, seemed to her to have some special significance and to be identified with her own mood of tender melancholy.

Yet her melancholy was not painful. The gentle depression which comes after strain or nervous excitement is sometimes almost pleasurable. Kooràli told herself that this was what she was feeling. She was tired, she said; she had been seeing too many people, taking in too many new impressions. She was tired of dressing up and laughing and talking "the fine weather." Why did the tears come into her eyes as she remembered Morse's phrase? She had found the great world of little account to her; and her own home had seemed no less barren than formerly, in contrast with the glare and glitter of London life. She was glad to be here, among the grey stones and the grim yews and the relics of the dead and gone Romans; glad to be without her husband, and with only her boys for companions; glad of the repose and the loneliness.

For she was very lonely. It came upon her with a shock sometimes that she had never in her life felt so lonely. She used to wake up at night and hear the train rushing by over the river, and the thought would overwhelm her suddenly, as such thoughts do, that among the myriads of sympathetic souls in the world, there was not one to which hers could turn with certainty of being understood. In the deeper sense of the relationship, she had neither father, mother, brother, friend, nor husband; and she felt an alien among strange people in a strange land.

She was restless, and she hardly understood why. She occupied herself in arranging the knick-knacks she had brought from London, in hanging draperies, and decorating the white-panelled walls. She walked a great deal, strolling for miles in aimless fashion along the river bank, where there was a towing-path, while the boys ran hither and thither, picking blackberries from the hedges, and reeds and marsh forget-me-nots. She did not show herself in the road or the town, and avoided acquaintanceship with the neighbours. That would come soon enough, she thought, when Crichton came back and insisted on dragging her into evidence, and when Zen, settled at the Priory-on-the-Water, should begin the series of garden parties and entertainments she had been planning.

One afternoon in late August she was walking alone by the river. The children were not with her. They had been taken by their nurse to a fancy fair at Lyndchester, and she had come out, carrying a little hooked implement, to gather bulrushes with which to decorate her drawing-room afresh before Kenway's return. She had gone some distance. Her depression seemed to have left her, and she felt alto-

gether more light-hearted, more capable of pure physical enjoyment than she had been for a long time before. As she filled her hands with the reeds and with trails of the nightshade, in this month red with berries, her pleasure in the occupation was almost childish. Every now and then she would pause and look over the meadow, and watch the cattle and sheep, and sniff the new-mown corn. The reapers had been at work, and the air was sweet with the breath of harvest. It was all unfamiliar to Kooràli—the flat landscape, the green grass, the yellow corn. "England is beautiful, too," she said to herself. She liked the crisp feel of the stubble underfoot as she strayed away from the towing-path. There was a fascination about the slate-coloured stream between its sedgy margins. In some places the current ran swiftly, in others there were still leaden pools, with patches of velvety slime and little islets of tufted rushes. Where the water was clear, the reflections showed distinct as in a looking-glass. The sky was dull, with white woolly clouds banked up on the southern horizon. Away to the west lay the town, and the valley seemed to stretch very far. Kooràli had reached a spot where there was an old grey stone bridge, vandyked as the bridges are in this county. Close to it, the river divided again, and made a tongue of land, on which stood a red brick water-mill. A delicious walled-in garden belonged to the mill—a garden filled with currant, gooseberry, and raspberry bushes, and with borders of fat hollyhocks, sunflowers, honesty, and Canterbury bells, and all the blossoms in the children's picture-books. Kooràli could smell the lavender and the late carnations across the stream. She thought of Miles's pet rhyme—

> "Mary, Mary, quite contrary; how does your garden grow?
> With silver bells and cockle shells, and ——"

She could not remember the rest, and was amused at her own childish longing to go into the garden. But these little commonplace things had the charm of novelty for the Australian girl, and her nature was a sweet and simple one that did not need artificial excitement to make its happiness. She liked the whole scene. There was to her something poetic in the little promontory and the gnarled pollarded willows growing close to the edge, in the cold still water, and in the solitary white swan which sailed about intensifying the impression of loneliness and tender sentiment.

Kooràli's course was interrupted by a dam that served the mill. She turned, crossed the bridge, getting on to the towing-path again, and walked along homeward, still looking back regretfully at the old-fashioned flower border across the stream. There was a bull grazing far away on the path in front of her. Kooràli eyed the animal nervously, ashamed of her timidity, yet afraid to go on—for even her Australian training had not enabled her to overcome a constitutional terror of cattle. It tossed its head—aggressively she thought—advanced a step or two, then stood still. It moved when Kooràli moved, but it came forward while she retreated. She coo-eed half involuntarily. A

shock-headed youth slouched out of the mill yard. He did not seem to notice her, and she coo-eed again, louder.

"Hoi," he drawled. And then in answer to Kooràli's question whether the beast was quiet, drawled again in strong Lyndfordshire accents, "Yeow wun't get no harm, Oi thoink."

"He *thinks*," murmured Kooràli tragically. She was enjoying the small adventure.

"Whom does the bull belong to?" she asked. "*Is* it a bull? Can't you drive it away?"

"It be Muster Dobito's; and it *be* a bull," rejoined the youth, "Oi thoink. Yeow go straight by. He win't stur, Oi thoink."

Kooràli fairly laughed aloud. The laugh made a pretty tinkling sound over the water, and she herself, standing with the tall reeds in her arms and the amusement and perplexity brightening her eyes, was a very charming object.

Just at that moment, and to her utter surprise, her Australian "coo-ee"—the peculiar cry, long, clear, and vibrating, with a sort of plaintive tone, the cry by which wanderers in the bush call for help and companionship—was answered by another coo-ee, as genuinely Australian as her own. The cry was in a man's voice; and it might have come from the very heart of the Australian bush.

Some one stepping out of the mill parlour thought instantly of a picture he had seen years ago—a girl, slender of form and with a dreamy joyous face, outlined against a grey sky.

Kooràli's coo-ee was an echo from the past. It had startled Morse as he was taking leave of the miller after a chat on Dissent, politics, and the sentiments of the agricultural labourer, that unknown quantity which might decide the future destinies of England. He had hardly known at first whether it was a real coo-ee, and then he came out and gave, half-unconsciously, his answering call, and saw the little creature standing there, separated from him by the cold grey line of water, with her pathetic face as childlike and as unconscious as when first it began to haunt him. Not the Kooràli of London drawing-rooms, but that Kooràli of the Australian dawn, which seemed to stand apart from his everyday life, and to have enshrined itself in the most poetic recesses of his nature.

They looked at each other across the narrow river. Kooràli uttered a low exclamation. To Morse, the cry of surprise and joy sounded inexpressibly sweet. But all was sweet and dear—the scene, the fading afternoon, the unexpected sight of her—too sweet and too dear to Lady Betty's husband, to the party leader, the man of the world, the Right Honourable Sandham Morse.

Kooràli bent forward, with arms outstretched involuntarily. Her lips were parted. Her face, a little upturned, was more eloquent than she knew. It was such a strange little face, Morse had often thought. It could look so frozen up at times, so grave and sad. But, then, when a smile of true feeling broke over it, and with a natural gesture, the throat curved backward, showing the chin foreshortened, the nostrils

dilated, and the quiver-shaped lips trembling, there came into it an expression of intense sensibility, and the suggestion it gave of capacity for passionate emotion might well stir the heart of such a man as Morse, and take away his self-command for a moment.

But he recovered himself immediately.

"Mrs. Kenway! How refreshing to hear an Australian coo-ee! I did not know that the Grey Manor was near enough for you to walk almost as far as Bromswold. I'll be over with you in a moment, and I'll drive away the bull and carry your reeds for you."

Before she could answer he was walking along the bank, and presently he had crossed the bridge, sent the bull to the other side of the meadow, and was beside her.

"For your future comfort, Mrs. Kenway, I'll tell you that legislation provides against the letting loose of dangerous animals in a field where there is a towing-path. The bull was a very peaceable animal; quite a benign old bull."

Kooràli looked very bright now, and laughed at her own discomfiture.

"I wasn't really frightened, Mr. Morse. I wanted to imagine myself into a dramatic situation; that was all. But, tell me, where is Bromswold? And have you become a travelling tinker, as you said you wished, that you are wandering by my river?"

Kooràli held out her hand, and Morse took it in his own, his eyes resting on her with tender interest.

"No, Mrs. Kenway, I haven't turned travelling tinker yet, though it is true that I sometimes wish I were one, and out of the turmoil of politics and the great world. And I don't mean to let you claim an entire right to the river. It belongs to Bromswold too, which I find now can only be a short distance from the Grey Manor across the meadows. It is six or seven miles by road."

"You are there now?" asked Kooràli, using the pronoun collectively.

"*I* am there—taking advantage of being alone to get up my speeches for the election, and to review the political situation, as the newspapers put it. No; as a matter of fact, I have what a public man should never own to—private business to look after—farms unlet, and that sort of thing. But Lady Betty is not here. She is still at Homburg with her father."

Kooràli had noticed that, unreserved as he was to her in regard to political matters and even his feelings and opinions, he did not often talk to her about his wife, and he always mentioned Lady Betty formally. She asked if Lord Germilion was better. They seemed to be in the conventional atmosphere once more.

"Arden and two or three other fellows are coming down, I believe, next week," Morse went on rather hurriedly; "and I must confess to abetting a slaughter you won't approve of, Mrs. Kenway. One of the men is great at pigeon shooting, and wants to get his hand in for the Monte Carlo matches; so I have been interviewing my friend the miller on the subject of pigeons."

There was a little silence. They had begun to walk slowly along the river bank.

"Tell me," he said abruptly. "This place suits you, doesn't it? There is something wild and picturesque about the long stretch of meadows, and the willows, and the sunset reddening the water? It's the sort of place to roam about and dream in. It isn't English, except the mill there, which might have come out of one of George Eliot's novels."

"I have been thinking of Miles's story-books," said Kooràli. "And I have been longing to go into the garden and listen if the flowers wouldn't each tell its own story, like the flowers in the old witch's garden when Hans Andersen's little Gerda went out into the wide world."

"Come, then," said Morse, with an eagerness foreign to his usual manner. "It *is* a garden in a story-book. Let us be like children for once, and I will ask the miller to let me gather you a bunch of lavender, and the flowers you fancy. They will tell you a story, perhaps, though they won't have any for me."

The two had crossed the bridge, and he opened a gate in the red brick wall, and took Kooràli into the garden. The house door at which he tapped led straight into the little parlour; and here, over a tea-service and a large plate of buttered toast, sat a purple-faced old man, with a Bible open beside his plate, an elderly woman in rusty black and a purple "crossover," sourly sanctimonious in expression, and a younger woman, lugubrious-looking also, and in deep weeds.

Morse explained that the old gentleman was Mr. Popkiss, the miller's father, the elderly woman his daughter, and the younger one a lodger. He introduced Kooràli, and accepted for her and for himself the cup of tea which was offered. His manner was delightful, Kooràli thought; it was so frank and easy. She did not wonder at his popularity among the poorer classes.

"I want you to let Mrs. Kenway pick a bunch of flowers for herself, Mr. Popkiss. I don't think she has ever seen an old-fashioned garden, with real English flowers in it, quite like yours. Mrs. Kenway is an Australian, and only came over to this country a very short time ago."

The information seemed to impress Mr. Popkiss somewhat. He was delighted at Kooràli's admiration of the garden; and then he asked a good many questions about Australia. He thought it was "a pity there weren't a many more young men making for Australia, instead of starving in counting-houses." "Why, sir," he said, turning to Morse, "there are boys in the big cities that don't earn enough for bread and cheese—no, nor bread by itself. I've got a nephew out in Australia as makes as much in one day at the plough, as his brother does in a week in a tea merchant's office in London. He'd set his heart on that, because he thought it a finer sort of thing. Twenty-five pounds a year, and expected to dress like a gentleman in a topper and a cloth coat! Why, I wouldn't stand that, ma'am; I'd first just kick the crown

out of the shiny hat, and then I'd off to Australia. Bless me, if I wouldn't!"

"No, you ain't a-going to tell me that, Popkiss. You'd stick to the old country, even though she's going down," said a big burly man who came in at that moment.

He stopped short in the middle of the room, while Morse got up, and held out his hand with a cordial "Ah! how are you, Mr. Dobito? I heard of you out cubbing this morning. How's the mare?"

"Oh, I'm topping well, and she don't want no nussing, Mr. Morse. She's a wonderful good 'oss, if you don't overpace her. *Not* a pleasant 'oss, *not* an easy mouth; but there ain't a stiff fence or a trappy ditch that *she* can't find her way over. She's as clever as a cat, she is. There weren't ever a fence she couldn't get through. She run sound —she do."

Mr. Dobito sat down after delivering this emphatic encomium on the mare, and went straight to his business, which appeared to be with Mrs. Prowse, and concerned a pig which he had bought at her request at Lyndchester market. When it was done with, he got up again, but did not seem inclined to go away. He was a curious-looking man, a perfect type of the old Midland farmer, tall, square-built, with a weather-beaten face, and a bald head fringed with iron-grey. He had another fringe of more stubbly growth round his chin. His eyes were black, beady, and humorous, his eyebrows and lashes thick and overhanging. His upper lip was long, his teeth were long also, and his mouth seemed the same width at the corners as at the middle.

"You weren't at the Liberal meeting at Lyndchester the other night, Dobito?" said Morse, anxious to draw him into conversation.

"I'm no Liberal, nor yet Conservative, nor Radical, Mr. Morse. Where's the good? I'm for the farmers, I am, and which of 'em all will listen to what the farmers have got to say, and call 'em aught but a grumbling lot? Why, God bless my soul, it's not because it's the nature of farmers to grumble; it's because of the extray burdens and the working man! I'm quite tired of that there working man. The Radicals and the noospapers have made an idol of him—they have."

"But they tell me wheat is going to rise, Mr. Dobito," said Morse.

"It'll rise when we've done growing it," said Mr. Dobito, with a dark and ominous frown. "Mark ye, Mr. Morse, England's going down. I don't say that she won't pick up; but there's too many cheap things sold. That's where the mischief lies. The work ain't well done. There's the shoes now."

Mrs. Prowse and the widow nodded in tragic assent.

"You ain't a-going to tell *me*," continued Mr. Dobito, "that the Russians, or the Belgians, or the Japanese, or any other *ese* is a-going to stand shoes with paper soles, and to send their leather over here when they can turn it into shoes at home. These manufactors all about here ain't got a conscience. *They* all stood ahind the door when consciences were given out. They make articles that ain't no articles

at all. But mark ye, ma'am," and Mr. Dobito fixed Kooràli with his glittering eye, "when the great Maker of all things has *His* word to say, why I reckon He'll make it hot for 'em!"

"Mrs. Kenway hasn't heard about the paper soles yet, Dobito," explained Morse. "She has only been at the Grey Manor for a few weeks. We must enlighten her about county affairs—you and I."

"Not Mrs. Kenway at the Priory?" said Mr. Dobito, looking doubtfully at Kooràli. "Quite another sort, begging your pardon, ma'am. That's Mrs. Eustace."

"My sister-in-law," said Kooràli.

"She's no mean galloper, she ain't," exclaimed Mr. Dobito enthusiastically. "I've seen her giving her 'oss a stretch. She do love dogs—why, she has a street of 'em, and she wants me to give her my opinion about a foxhound terrier she's got, and she's a-going to bring him over to my ricks. I don't think so much of her husband. He don't care about hunting; a coach and pair, that's about *his* form. Looks as though he wanted roast beef and port wine. I reckon he lives on kickshaws and your new-fangled soda water, or Apollinaris, with a dash of whiskey in 'em, that makes it worse. I don't hold to that rubbish. It's my way to go on straight with the port."

"Really, Mr. Dobito, I think you're a little unjust to my brother-in-law," said Kooràli, laughing. "I assure you I've seen him go on straight with the port too."

"Maybe," returned the farmer. "I did hear of him the other day buying two hunters—I didn't see him, mind—I didn't see him; but I thought to myself 'That looks better.' Well, good day to you, Mrs. Prowse, I'll see about the pig coming. Good-bye, ma'am, I hope I'll see you again, with Mrs. Eustace. Good-bye, Mr. Morse."

Old Popkiss, in his capacity of host, hobbled to the door, and watched Mr. Dobito mount. When he came back, he seemed determined to have his innings, for Mr. Dobito had monopolized the conversation. Mr. Popkiss talked volubly and discursively. He addressed Morse principally.

Kooràli was a little shy, but she tried to make conversation with the women. Presently, however, the younger one in black got up with a somewhat tragic air and withdrew.

"She's a widow that we have here with us, ma'am," remarked Mr. Popkiss confidentially. "She's the widow of the doctor's assistant at Lyndchester. She's in deep sorrow."

"Oh, I hope that she didn't mind our coming in," exclaimed Kooràli sympathetically.

"It comes hard upon her," continued Mr. Popkiss; "for she has been used to high life—to high life," he repeated impressively. "A horse and shay and a pound a day. Not that she ain't comfortable now; but for them as has been used to high life, it's hard to come down to that which is low. But I says to her, 'The Lord must ha' set great store on you, Mrs. Bird, or He wouldn't have taken your husband from you.'"

"Some of us might think that view of Providence rather a harsh one," said Morse.

"There's my daughter, Mrs. Prowse," Mr. Popkiss went on, taking no notice of the remonstrance, "a widow likewise; and her husband was a sore trial—as must be a consolation to Mrs. Bird; for it's comforting to the afflicted to be with them that have passed through the deep waters."

Kooràli looked sympathetically at Mrs. Prowse, who cast down her eyes, conscious apparently of having been unjustly buffeted by Fate, and heaved a deep sigh.

"It were an awful trial," she murmured. "No one knows what it is but them as has to endure it. I wouldn't wish my enemy worse luck nor a husband as ha' got a liver."

Morse laughed pleasantly as he rose.

"We've all got livers in these days, Mrs. Prowse—we men; and tempers, too. I am afraid that both Mrs. Kenway and my wife have to suffer from them sometimes. Now, we'll go and gather our flowers, if we may, and I shan't let you come out with us, Mrs. Prowse, for the mists are rising, as I know that you are apt to take a chill and are not as strong as you might be."

They said good-bye, shaking hands with the old people, and left the parlour. As Kooràli stooped over the lavender bush underneath the open window she heard Mrs. Prowse remark in a tone of gratification—

"There *be* a difference in the hearts of men, to be sure. Now, Mr. Morse, he do show a heart for sickness. There's parson at Lyndchester—*he* don't understand a poor body's complaints. I met him the other day, and I'd just put my foot out, to pick up a few sticks. 'Wny, Mrs. Prowse,' says he, 'I'm pleased to see you so well, and taking a walk.' And he might ha' knowed," added Mrs. Prowse, with sorrowful resentment, "that I were but weakly in my health, and couldn't get as far as the bridge to save my life, nor have done it this many years."

Kooràli laughed softly, and looked up at Morse, who added clove pinks and sweet-smelling stocks to her lavender, and soon they had a goodly bunch. He watched her as one might watch a happy child. In truth she was very happy. She enjoyed the little experience. There was in it something idyllic, and, simple as it all was, unlike any other experience. He too seemed to have unbent, and to be more of the schoolboy than the statesman. As they walked along the river bank towards the Grey Manor they talked in an inconsequent fashion, which was, for that reason perhaps, very sweet. It was the easy interchange of passing thoughts between two dear companions, who are living just in the hour and in the certainty of each other's sympathy, and underlying the light flow there was the faint consciousness of emotion, at once exciting and soothing. She knew, though he did not tell her, that he had been thinking much of her during their separation. Nothing definite was said about the loss of her husband's appointment and the political crisis at hand. Yet she felt vaguely that both had been in his mind in connection with her wishes for the future. He

asked her, "Did she like the Grey Manor? Did she regret London? Would she mind living in the country for a time, or would she prefer to go back to Australia?" And from her simple replies, and the chance revelations she made of her occupations, her interests, her train of thought, he learned with a curious pleasure that she was beginning to be fond of England, that she could be very happy with her children in the quiet natural life she led. It was monotonous, perhaps, she said; but nothing jarred here. And she thought she liked being dull, and sometimes even melancholy was pleasant—"like sad poetry." She liked to be left alone, and she liked "the peace of it all." And then it came out that all this time her husband had been away.

Morse asked when Kenway was expected back.

"To-morrow, or the next day, I think," she answered; "but Crichton is always uncertain, and it depends upon whether he has good shooting and is amused."

"I hope he will be here on the 1st," said Morse, "and that he will tramp a few turnip-fields with me. I can't tell what sort of a bag we are likely to get off Bromswold; but, anyhow, we shall have a few birds."

They had come to the bend of the river below the railway bridge.

The sun was gone down, and there was only a faint radiance in the west. It did not seem to reach them. Here the water was leaden, and the images in it of the trees and the arches of the bridge looked black and sharp. A man fishing at the sedgy border of the bend stood reflected—two figures, as it were, joined at the feet—a strange lonely object against the sky. There was a thin vaporous moon shining above the Grey Manor, which rose on the opposite bank.

Morse was struck by the aspect of the place—the raised terrace, with its odd loopholes, and the grey house, ivy-grown and set between the clumps of solemn yews. He, too, at that instant felt something of Kooràli's prophetic instinct.

He went with her to a wicket gate at one end of the terrace beneath the yews, and opened it for her to pass through. Then he held out his hand.

"You won't come in?" she said, with timid questioning. "I want you to see the house and some Australian things I have put up."

"Not this evening. I shall have to walk fast to get home in time for an appointment. But may I come to-morrow afternoon and see you—and the Australian things?"

"Oh yes, I shall be so glad." A bright look of pleasure flashed over the sensitive little face. She gathered up her reeds and her flowers, holding them close to her so that the bulrushes framed her head.

He seemed to linger. "Yes," he said, at once musingly and abruptly, "I like this background for you better than the London one. It seems somehow to bring you back as you first appeared to me. Do you remember, when we met in London, how your name—Kooràli—came to my lips at once? I feel the same sort of impulse here."

Kooràli turned her large soft eyes straight upon him in that silent way she had. No words she could have uttered then would have conveyed to him what that look told. It was so childlike, and yet so full of dignity, of pathos, of trust.

He took her hand in his. His eyes were no less earnest, no less unflinching in their gaze. "Good-bye," he said, "Kooràli, my little queen."

"Good-bye," she answered, in a strange, subdued voice, and they parted.

As he walked homeward and from the river bank looked up at the terrace, he saw her standing there still, with her children by her side. She was watching him; but her children were by her side.

CHAPTER XVII.

"ONE TOUCH LIGHTS UP TWO LAMPS."

THE next morning's post-bag, which came when Kooràli was breakfasting, brought no news of Crichton. Kooràli had half expected to hear that he would return that day. Now she knew that he was not coming. As she put down the last of the pile of unopened letters, at which she had glanced one by one, and was certain that there was none from him, she was almost frightened at the wild bound her heart gave. Another day of peace and irresponsibility—of freedom, of happiness. What had come to her? Why the soft glow at her heart, the secret hugging of moments, which owed their charm to pleasurable anticipation? To what did she look forward? She had been lonely; she had been vaguely sad. Now she was no longer lonely and sad. Her spirits had regained their elasticity. The world was beautiful, the sky was bright, and the air sweet. She wanted to wander out in the sunshine, to breathe the scent of flowers and corn and meadow-sweet, to have her pulses stirred by the rustle of the wind, the singing of the birds, the murmur of the bees. Why should she not yield to this luxurious sense of delight, which was in itself so pure and so natural? She shook herself free of the chill terror which for an instant seized and bewildered her. She caught up her letters again, and took little Miles's hand in hers. The child had been watching her wistfully,

"Come, my little boys," she said, "we shall have such a happy morning, and while I read my letters, you shall go and get your rakes, and we will make the lawn tidy, because we are going to have a visitor to-day."

"Who?" cried Lance. And Miles asked eagerly, "Is it Mr. Morse?"

"Yes; it is Mr. Morse," answered Kooràli.

"They were talking about Mr. Morse at Lyndchester fair yesterday," said Lance, "and one man said he was a coward, because he wanted

the English to knock under and not fight. Fight who, mamma? And another man—I think it was Mr. Dobito—was very angry, and he said he wished they'd make Mr. Morse Prime Minister, because he'd take taxes off the people."

Kooràli listened with interest. "And what else did they say, Lance?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Lance. "I didn't care. I want to go back to Australia; it's all jolly humbug here. Oh yes, I remember. They were talking about Prime Ministers, and Mr. Dobito said there was old Gladstone would stand up with a long glib tongue and talk a lot of bosh, but that Mr. Morse was the man for the farmers, for he wanted to make Englishmen comfortable, and didn't care to go about the world killing savages. What does that mean, mamma? Who is killing savages?"

Kooràli read her letters under the yew trees. One from Zenobia, in a great square envelope, fantastically ribbed and mottled and emblazoned with the Kenway arms, told her that her time of seclusion was almost over. Zen wrote a big round hand, like the hand of a schoolboy of nine. Her epistolary style was discursive, like her conversation, and sometimes amusing. She wrote from the Canteloupes' place in Yorkshire, where she and Eustace were staying on their way back from Scotland.

"DEAREST KOORÀLI,

"We are going to be at the Priory on the 2nd. You and Crichton are to come over and stop a week with me, and admire the house now it's done up. I think you'll say I know how to make myself comfortable. Having done that, I shall get you and Lord Arden to show me how I can make the village comfortable. It's all beastly new—I mean the furniture. The village is as old as the Knights Templar. I notice that in most houses the furniture isn't new, and that it looks dirty. *I* like things clean—spick-and-span; floors you could eat your dinner off. Anyhow, I'm new, so it will suit me, if it doesn't suit Eustace. I think I'm too new for him, only he is too polite to say so. The Family hasn't snuffed me out yet. There are sixteen of them here. It's family sauce with everything. Some of them are Catholics and some are Protestants; that's the only variety. I notice there's an awful lot of ceremony in the way Protestants approach their Creator. Sunday is the State function. It must be something real serious before they'll venture on a confidential week-day communication. Old Canteloupe, in his own house, looks about as comfortable and as much at home as a cat in a cold bath. Her ladyship snaps him up pretty sharp. She's a beast, with a long nose and short petticoats—'suitable for country wear, my dear'—and she looks at my velvet frock with an evil eye. I do love velvet, but it seems to get the mange when she looks at it. I feel a patchwork of brutality and blasphemy when she empties out Solomon's precepts over me. Tell Crichton there's a man here with his eye on a spaniel exactly

answering to the description he gave me of what he wanted. She is black, without a white hair; nine months old, tender-mouthed, used to rabbits, but isn't acquainted with partridges. Her mother took second prize at Birmingham, and she costs four pounds. If Crichton won't have her, she shall go into my dog-street. I am afraid, my dear, the horizon of your prospects is beastly clouded. The Family is a widow's cruise of dark prognostics. 'Sweet are the uses of adversity.' Rot! A splendid plaster to another person's gash, but hot iron to your own. However, if Morse comes in it will be all right for you, and, see-saw, down with the aristocracy and up with Hodge and his cow. I'm new, so it won't do for me to be a democrat. I belong to the Primrose League, and I am ordering a primrose skirt. Shan't I look lovely?

"Good-bye. Mind, you are to come on the 2nd.

"Your affectionate sister-in-law,

"ZENOBIA KENWAY."

Kooràli smiled softly as she read Zen's letter, but her face became grave when she finished it. She did not like the suggestion that Morse would provide for them if he should come into power. She would rather that their friendship should be without taint of time-serving or self-interest. It pained her to have it brought home to her that when Zen spoke out many others must be thinking.

When Morse arrived, the children were having tea in an odd excrescence leading off the hall, a queer little room of no particular shape, with a deep mullioned window, over which the ivy crept, and a panelled mantel-board that lifted up and showed dark cavities once used for keeping tinder in, the delight of the boys, a store to them of fathomless mystery and inexhaustible possibilities of concealment.

Lance jumped up, crying, "Mr. Morse." He had caught sight of Morse's tall form passing the window.

It was Kooràli herself who appeared in the open doorway just as he stepped within to reach the ancient iron knocker.

"We are very primitive, you see," she said, smiling. "We don't indulge in the luxury of bells, and we let our door stand open because it is so heavy, and the latch is so huge and clumsy that the children could not draw it if they tried."

Morse admired the thick oak beams studded with immense nails, and the rusty iron bars and gigantic key standing in the lock. He admired also the low hall, with its oak panelling notched and defaced in many places, its dingy ceiling crossed with beams, its massive doors opening in all directions, and its stone-flagged floor, on which Kooràli had thrown opossum rugs and kangaroo skins. Though simple even to bareness, it was all very picturesque, and it seemed to him in keeping with Kooràli herself.

"It puts me in mind of Australia," she said, "except for the grey stone and the oak and the Romans. I must show you the coffins presently. The kitchen is next this, so we haven't far to go for anything

we want. And oh, Mr. Morse, there is quite a manorial fireplace in it, and a real ingle-nook!"

He had the same feeling as yesterday, that life was altogether more natural and joyous, and that the restraints of conventionality might be cast aside. She looked so simple and childlike with her children. She brought him into the little room and gave him tea with them. She did not summon a servant, but with Miles waited upon him. Lance was sent for a fresh cup and plate, she herself went for some wonderful strawberry jam, for which the boys had pleaded in honour of the guest. They were very merry, with just an undertone of emotion running through the merriment. Morse had a pleasant way with children. He laughed heartily when Lance gravely asked him whether he was really afraid to let the English fight, and if the Queen would make him Prime Minister, and repeated Mr. Dobito's remarks.

When tea was over Kooràli sent the children away to their play, and took him into her sitting-room, which was one of the Georgian rooms, and had lofty white-panelled walls, and tall straight windows, with window-seats. She had managed to make this like herself too, with the bits of drapery flung about, and the Australian weapons and skins and pieces of *tapa* contrasting oddly with the knick-knacks she had brought from London and some specimens of Roman pottery ranged on the high mantel-shelf.

Their talk rippled on much as it had done the day before.

"I don't think people get half enough out of life," Morse said, "half as much as they might."

"But you surely have got a good deal out of life?" Kooràli said, looking at him with a kind of wonder. He had seen so much, done so much, lived so much.

"Yes, I have got a good deal out of it. I have tried to warm both hands before the fire of life."

"That is a good way of putting it. I like that," Kooràli said quickly.

"It's not mine; it's Savage Landor's. The fire is apt to scorch sometimes."

"With most people to turn into embers and ashes, I think," Kooràli said, and then wished she had said something else, or said nothing.

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "you haven't much confidence in the theory that every one is meant to be happy."

She smiled a little sadly. "I haven't much confidence in anything. I think it all left me when I——" She was going to say, "when I married," but she did not. She said, "when I grew to be a woman."

"Why, then?" he asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps I had too much confidence before, and expected more out of life than I'd any right to."

"One has a right to expect a good deal out of life. There ought to be material enough in life for each of us to have his heart's desire, sooner or later. The worst is, that we most of us make it a 'too soon' or a 'too late.'"

"Ah, yes," Kooràli said quickly.

"The pieces are all there," Morse went on, "but we shake them up impatiently, and the right ones can't by any reasonable possibility be got together, and the wrong ones are wedged fast; and it ends in a stalemate rather than a checkmate, for the most part."

There was a short pause. Her breath came a little faster. It was strange to hear the successful man talk thus, with his melancholy metaphor about life's stalemate. Kooràli was seated before a little table, on which she leaned with her hands clasped upon it. All the time they had been speaking his eyes had been turned away from hers. Once or twice he had moved as if he were going to say good-bye, and had only remained because of some question or remark from her. Suddenly he changed his place, and took a chair opposite her. As he did this he bent forward, and by some chance his hand for a second touched her clasped hands. His hand was withdrawn in an instant; the gesture was merely accidental and unconscious, but the feeling which it brought was like that of an electric shock. For an instant he held his breath, as a man might do who fears he has unconsciously let out a secret. But with this, too, was a personal sense of surprise and dismay; he had revealed to himself his own secret. That could be hidden no longer—from him at least.

When his hand touched hers, Kooràli looked up at first a little surprised. Of course she knew that the touch was unconscious, inadvertent, accidental, and yet she felt her forehead grow hot, and she bent her head as if she would hide some sudden expression of feeling. She drew herself back behind a line of mental reserve, and there was a moment's awkward silence. Each felt, each feared that the other knew and felt also. Then there was a plunge into talk again, each rushing at the opening of a conversation, each apparently trying to get the first word. Morse had, however, quite pulled himself together by this time. He had come there with the intention of speaking to Kooràli on what might be called in very strictness a matter of business. Under the fresh charm of the situation and their talk, he had put off and off the difficulty he found in approaching it. Now, however, he was determined that the question must be raised at once. His own feelings of a moment ago warned him that he must come to the business he had in his mind. It would have had to come, in any case. He had thought it out for some time, but the warning his heart had just given him was only another reason to show that he had thought it out to good purpose. So he stopped her rather abruptly in a little speech she was beginning on some subject in which she had no manner of interest. As he interrupted her he got up and stood with his hat in his hand ready to go. The moment he rose Kooràli rose also. She did not know why; it looked as if she wanted him to go—almost seemed ungracious, she thought.

"Mrs. Kenway," he said, "there's something I wanted to say to you. Our talk yesterday set me thinking about you and your future. I don't know why, unless it was because you seemed so contented and

like your real self in this place. I don't think the life of London would ever quite suit you. I fancy that I've told you that before, haven't I? I think you might be happier, and that it might be better for you and yours, if your husband got an appointment which would take you away from London."

He watched her anxiously as he spoke. He saw that she did not realize the full import of this tentative suggestion which he had prepared so carefully. Her face took the blank chill look that comes over the face of a child at the first hint that its holiday must end.

"Away?" she repeated. "Out of London? I don't know that I should care for that, Mr. Morse, though I am very happy here. I am afraid that when Crichton comes back, this simple, dull sort of life, and my satisfaction with it, will come to an end," she added, with a rather sad little laugh. "There will be so much more needed to make us happy—so much that we haven't got. But if Crichton is fortunate enough to get an English appointment, it must be in London."

Morse felt a pang of pity and tenderness at her half-unconscious revelation. "I suppose," he said, "that an appointment out of London *would* mean one out of England. Should you mind that very much?"

She looked up in a startled way, and met his eyes. She saw the anxiety in his face, though he spoke in quite unemotional tones. "I —I don't know," she said falteringly. "I haven't thought about it lately. I am afraid that I take life too much as it comes, and don't trouble sufficiently about the morrow."

"I wish that I could keep you from any need to trouble about the morrow," he exclaimed. Then he went on with insistent emphasis. "Just think over this idea of a colonial appointment, Mrs. Kenway—that is what I meant—and tell me what your wishes really are. Oddly enough, when I got home last night, I found a letter which showed me a chance of serving you in that way."

He still watched her intently. A faint flush came over Kooràli's face. She did not answer at once. Then she said in a chilled voice—

"Mr. Morse, you are very good to us, but I don't feel as though we had any right to be considered. Crichton has no claim——"

"Oh yes, Mrs. Kenway, your husband has a claim, and he has interest, which comes to the same thing. He has gained a reputation, and deservedly, for tact and knowledge in colonial affairs. He will confer a benefit on his country by his services. That is the way to put it. He has more or less identified himself, however, with me and my party, and I begin to doubt more and more whether I shall be able to accept the position which—which, you know, people think I am sure to have, and my friends, who expect to see me in such a position, might be disappointed. And I think, if your husband would take this offer, it would be better in every way. I don't know if you quite understand?"

Oh yes; she quite understood, and she felt ashamed. Morse knew that her husband was merely looking to him for an appointment. Morse was warning him through her that after the elections he might

not be able to do all that Kenway expected. Morse knew also that Kenway's tastes and habits made it better for him to be removed from the temptations and ambitions and social competitions and moral dangers of a London life.

"Yes, I understand," she said sadly.

After he had gone, Kooràli went into the house. The children came to her before her dinner. Lance was making a boat, and did not care to talk or ask questions, but little Miles crept up to her and begged that she would read him a story. She did not know what it was that made her voice quaver so as she read. Perhaps it was because the story was a sad one. When she had finished and had put the book down, Miles said to her, with his big clear eyes lifted to her face—

"Mother, I want you to do something for me."

"What is it, dear?"

"I want you to tell me about your life. A great many mothers in books write the stories of their lives and different things to amuse their little children."

"What sort of things? What do you want to know?"

"Oh, everything! What you did when you were a little girl, and why you married father, and if he asked you or you asked him."

"You foolish child—women never ask men if they'll marry them."

"Yes they do—in leap year—Amelia says so. And I want to know if you were happy when you married father, and if you have any great secret that you have kept all your life."

Kooràli bent her head, and laid her cheek upon the boy's curls. "What great secret could I have, Miles?"

"Oh, there's lots—in books. There was one in 'The Mysterious House in Chelsea.' The lady was in love with another man, and she was afraid her husband would come to know it. But Amelia took it away from me before I had got half through it. Mother! what's the matter?"

A great drop had fallen on the child's cheek. Lance broke in—

"Miles is always getting hold of Amelia's books—marrying and love and jolly rot. I wouldn't read such stuff. When I'm a man and want to get married, I'll do as father says—go straight to the girl, and say, 'Now, what about the coin?'"

"Was that what father said to you, mother?" said Miles, still inquisitive.

Kooràli roused herself. She laughed—a laugh with the sound of tears in it. "Lance is quite right. Amelia's books are not boy's books, and boys should think of cricket and boats, and not of things that only older people have to do with. Good night, my children."

She ate her lonely dinner, or rather made a pretence of eating it. As she was leaving the dining-room, the maid brought in a telegram, and waited to see if there was any answer for the messenger to take back. Kooràli opened the telegram. A strange horrible chill fell upon her. It was from Crichton.

"I return to-morrow. Meet train arriving Lyndchester at 3.15."

"There is no answer," Kooràli said in a mechanical tone. "Mr. Kenway is coming to-morrow."

The maid went out. For a few moments Kooràli stood by the table with a dazed frightened look on her face. At last, at last! At this moment the full revelation had come upon her. The shock she felt at the news of Crichton's coming told her all. She seemed to grow paler and paler, and her dark eyes gazed anxiously into vacancy. Steps in the hall brought her to herself. She crushed the telegram in her hand; then, remembering Crichton's fussy particularity—as even in agony some everyday trifle is apt to cross the mind—and fearing his anger if any mistake were made as to the hour he had specified, she smoothed out the pink paper and placed it on the mantel-piece, where it might be referred to if necessary. She did not go back to the sitting-room, but crept upstairs to her own bedroom. It was almost in darkness. The window was open, and mingled twilight and moonlight filled it with shadows. A bat flew in and circled, making its uncanny noise, and she could hear a corncrake shrieking in the meadow below. She stood at the window for a minute or two and looked out. The river and the fields were covered with a thick white mist, like a grave-cloth. The flame of the furnace opposite was leaping wildly, showing its fierce blaze against a bank of clouds. As she watched, an express train trailing fiery smoke swept like a meteor above the level of the mist.

Kooràli shivered and turned away. She could not bear just now to look at this weird scene, so unlike any other scene she had ever known. Tossing ocean, or desolate stretch of bush or wild headland, might have given her a sense of relief and anchorage. She seemed to have lost all familiar landmarks. She was in a new world of experience, of emotion, of dangers that she had never feared before; a world in which there seemed only two realities—her children and this great terrible love. For she knew it now. She knew it because of the dread and repulsion she had felt on reading her husband's telegram. She might have known it long ago had she not allowed herself to drift on in fancied security, never pausing to think or to analyze her own feelings. Yes; she loved Morse. This was her secret, the secret no one might share, which she must hide guiltily from her boys' clear eyes as they grew old enough to understand; from her husband—from the world—from Lady Betty, sweet, generous Lady Betty, who had been so frankly kind to her—and more closely, oh, far more closely still, from Morse himself; yes, if possible, from Heaven.

The bat came wheeling nearer to the motionless figure. Kooràli started at the flapping of its wings near her head. She was very cold, but she would not go down to the sitting-room, where were lamps and the fire she always had lighted for company's sake. She wanted to be quiet and alone, to think it all out. Yet somehow she could not think coherently. She could only go back upon foolish memories—Morse's look sometimes when she found his eyes upon her, and little irrelevant things he had said.

There was a quaint turret chamber, hardly more than a closet, leading by a flight of narrow oak steps from her bedroom. She groped her way to a door in the wainscoting, and mounted to the little dim place, which was bare, and lighted only by the moonbeams creeping with difficulty through the ivy tendrils that grew over the tiny window. She seated herself as a child might upon the topmost step of the little stair, with her form bent forward, and her arms clasped round her knees, and her eyes wide and staring.

She sat thus for a long time. This hour recalled to her another hour long ago—the hour in which she had first distinctly acknowledged to herself that her husband's absence was ease, his presence pain. That discovery had come upon her with a shock as something horrible, almost incredible; but the shock had been of a different kind from this. She had been able to face it calmly. She had simply accepted the fact that her marriage was a fatal mistake—that her lot must be lonely, her existence one of passive endurance—that love and sympathy were not for her. At least, she had believed life could not be complicated by stormy passion. If her thoughts had ever glanced towards the one possibility she had most reason to tremble at, she had turned them quickly away, telling herself that this was an impossibility. And now the impossibility had come to pass. She loved with the whole strength of her soul a man whom she was forbidden to love, not only by her own duties as wife and mother, but also by the laws of friendship and of loyalty between woman and woman.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRIORY-ON-THE-WATER.

Zenobia had taken up her abode at the Priory-on-the-Water with a fixed determination to play her part as country matron in becoming style. She started with a smiling audacity which was characteristic of her. There was something rather American in her "cute" simplicity. Her experience of this phase of English society was limited. When not living with her step-mother, who, to use Zenobia's own expression, was "beastly bad form," she had spent her time in foreign hotels. Now she meant to be "the real thing, and no mistake," to go in for farming, or at any rate, knowing all about it, garden parties, county balls, county politics, sport, and anything that occurred to her as being suitable to the situation. She set about her task with a good deal of enthusiasm, and in a generous spirit. There seemed to her something fine and heroic in restoring the Kenways to their ancestral home and in refounding the family, so to speak, with her fortune. This was her theory. In practice, comfort was her first consideration. She intended to make Eustace and herself thoroughly comfortable. She thought of Eustace quite as much as of herself. It was a great disappointment to find that an old leather arm-chair, an oak bureau

that might have been in a cottage, and an unlimited supply of cigars and French novels, were all that Eustace seemed to require to make him happy. She had begun by lining the walls of his study with stamped leather of new and fashionable design—a wonderful combination of old gold, browns, and reds; had hung up *portières* of imitation Gobelin tapestry, and had ordered from Tottenham Court Road the most sombrely gorgeous and most complicated modern suite which the art of upholsterer could produce for the delectation of amateur country gentlemen. Eustace, however, rebelled against the chairs which concealed, in their capacious arms and under their stuffing, cigarette caskets and ash receptacles, reading-desks, trays and tumblers, and other conveniences. He declined the magnificent writing-table, with its appliances for reducing literary labour to a minimum, and ordered in the old arm-chair and the bureau which Zenobia had sent to the lumber-room.

"My dear child," he said to her in his elaborate manner, "pray consult your own taste as regards the rest of the house, and play about among the relics as much as you please, but do me the inestimable favour to respect my notions of comfort, which are elementary, I admit. I can't smoke and go to sleep and enjoy 'Richard Omonroy' when I'm leaning against new Russian leather that makes me smell all the day like a freshly bound Christmas gift-book."

Eustace Kenway did not take kindly to the part of country gentleman. He had not his brother's power of adaptability or his brother's ambition. He could not shoot well, and he thought hunting a great deal of trouble for nothing. School boards and petty sessions were beyond him, and he did not feel any interest in crops or in shorthorns, and hated young lambs, except with the accompaniments of green peas and mint sauce. He was very colourless. If he had any special tendency, it was in the direction of art, but he had always been too poor or too lazy to cultivate it. He winced a little at Zenobia's robust and vigorous attacks on life, in which she got all she could out of it. It seemed to him like seeing a boxing match. She jarred a good deal upon his nerves. He sometimes suggested that there was a want of repose in her manners. Her energy appeared to him like that of a flail; but it was a point of honour with him not to interfere in her way of amusing herself. He did not suppose that the country craze would last long, and then, he concluded, they would go to Paris or London, where he could always find enjoyment. So Zenobia, left to her own devices, did play about among the relics. She ordered down an army of workmen and upholsterers, and very soon effected not a mere change, but rather a radical revolution in the appearance of the Priory-on-the-Water.

Crichton Kenway and his wife did not come on the 2nd, as Zenobia had suggested. Morse's shooting party took place on the 1st, and Crichton was not willing to miss it. He was particularly anxious to appear on good terms with the coming man, as Morse was considered, and then the bachelor party was very pleasant for him. Lord Arden

was in it, and the two or three fellows of whom Morse had spoken turned out to be young politicians of distinction; men to talk with about the coming elections. Crichton did not look forward either with very great pleasure to visiting his brother in the refurbished ancestral home, though he created quite a pretty part for himself as a sort of deposed sovereign, joked about the primitive simplicity of the Grey Manor, and never let any one forget that he was the eldest son, and should by right be reigning at the Priory. No one took any trouble to inquire back into the Kenway genealogy, and, on the whole, Crichton made an excellent impression in the county as a capital shot, a likely man in the hunting field, and a clever, affable fellow, quite in the first rank of society. Altogether it was felt to be a great pity that he had not secured the heiress. No one thought much of Eustace, who seemed too lazy even to fall off a horse.

Crichton was asked to dine and sleep at Bromswold, and to shoot on the following day. Lady Betty had not yet returned, though she was expected the next week, and therefore Kooràli was not included in the invitation. She had not seen Morse since that night of self-revelation. She sometimes wondered within herself how it would be possible for her to talk to him ever again in the old, free, unembarrassed manner, and was glad to think that she was going away for a little while, and would meet him, if she must meet him, in the Priory atmosphere, and not amid the melancholy, poetic surroundings of the Grey Manor.

Zenobia drove over on the afternoon of the 2nd to see her sister-in-law. She looked an odd, incongruous figure in her startling French costume, as she stood in the bare hall and gazed round her, and then at Kooràli, with an expression of sympathetic dismay. So thought Arden, who had slipped away from the shooters and had found his way along the river to call on Kooràli.

"Well! I don't wonder that you like London best," said Zenobia abruptly, after having drawn a deep breath.

"But I don't think I do like London best," replied Kooràli, with her gentle smile. "We are very happy here, the boys and I."

Zenobia's high-heeled French shoes clacked on the stone floor as she walked round and inspected the dilapidated oak panelling.

"I should want a lot of things done to make me comfortable in this place," she said frankly; and one could not help thinking that she was on the point of saying, "beastly place."

"What sort of things, Mrs. Eustace Kenway?" asked Lord Arden, coming forward. "I should like very much to know what would make you happy."

"Why, Persian carpets and big screens to keep out the draughts, and divans and blue china, and pots and pans, don't you know? and palm-trees, and a man in armour dotted about here and there."

"Two or three ancient Romans dug out of the encampment?" suggested Arden. "Have you got any for the Priory, Mrs. Eustace?"

"I've ordered three Crusaders," replied Zen promptly. "I suppose

they can be got somewhere—at Whiteley's, perhaps, don't you think? My goodness, Kooràli, you do look thin and pale! Have you been ill?"

The blood rushed to Kooràli's face, making it white no longer. The change in her was indeed noticeable. It had struck Arden the instant he saw her, and he had been full of pain and wonder, certain that some secret trouble weighed upon her. She was wan, and her features seemed sharper, while her eyes had the strained, smarting look which betokens tears kept resolutely back. She had suffered much during the past few days. Every word and look of Crichton's had probed her wound. He had come home in the mood for endearments, which he commanded, rather than entreated, and Kooràli's repulsion to kisses, accepted by her hitherto as a fact in her life to be patiently submitted to, had now become keen agony and humiliation.

Seeing her embarrassment at Zenobia's abrupt exclamation, Arden said, "I have been telling Mrs. Kenway that I don't think the river mists agree with her."

"She must have a change right away," said Zenobia with energy, and, turning to Kooràli, added, "What day have you and Crichton fixed upon? I am very angry with you for putting me off. He could have shot at Bromswold just as well from us, couldn't he now, Lord Arden?"

"We are coming on Monday," said Kooràli.

"And you, Lord Arden?" continued Zenobia, "you and Mr. Morse? You are going to shoot and stop for dinner. The Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp is to be with us, and a London masher for Jo. It will be a queer kind of party—a little of all sorts. London swells and Steve Dobito, yeoman."

"I have heard a great deal about Steve Dobito," said Lord Arden. "I particularly want to meet him. He is a man with views."

"He is very anxious to improve Mr. Morse's mind," said Zenobia, "and so I thought I'd just give him a chance. Eustace and Mrs. Nevile said that dinner parties wouldn't be in his line," pursued Zen reflectively. "I shouldn't think they were much; but if he wants his pudding before his meat, why, he shall have it."

"I don't know that there is any eternal principle involved in the eating one's meat before one's pudding," Arden said reflectively.

"I think puddings beastly anyhow and anywhere," Zen affirmed, with all the warmth of evident sincerity. "But you know, Lord Arden, it wasn't that I meant. I only meant that I wanted the poor man to have his way. I wasn't thinking about puddings."

"Dear Zen, I am sure Lord Arden quite understood that you were speaking the language of metaphor," Kooràli said, with a compassionate smile, poor Zen seemed so eager to vindicate herself.

"One don't want to be thought, to be always talking nonsense and vulgarity," Zen pleaded apologetically.

"You always talk very good sense," Lord Arden said gravely, and with a determined effort to break through his habitual shyness, and

say exactly what he felt and what he wanted to say, "and there never could be vulgarity where there is no affectation."

"Come, now, ain't that nice?" Zen said, and a dash of colour came into her face. In truth, Lord Arden saw as clearly as Koorâli did the truthfulness, the womanliness, underneath that Parisian bodice: the shrewd honest good sense in that little black cropped head, and which all Zen's own ivory brushes, and all the ivory brushes "brandished" by Disraeli's duchesses, could not scrub out of it.

Koorâli felt a little vague enthusiasm as they approached the Priory on the appointed day. She glanced at her husband as they drove up the village street, to see if the place awakened old memories. She could have felt much sympathy with him in such a mood. But he was leaning back in the carriage looking sullen and perplexed. She seemed to know by a sort of flashing instinct that he was weighing the for and against Morse's accession to power, and speculating with an absolutely concentrated regard to his own interest whether it might not be wiser to accept the proverbial "bird in the hand," than to wait for the problematical "two in the bush." To her surprise he did not seem to know how to direct the coachman when the latter appealed to him, and they were obliged to ask the way to the Priory of an old man by the roadside.

"I suppose that you were very young when you went away from the place?" she said, wondering a little, for she had often heard him speak of his "old home."

"My father left it before I was born," he answered shortly. There was silence again, and she had no remark to make on the quaint arched gateway with a grey stone pigeon-cote on either side.

The house was an imposing structure, a massive pile, with two wings forming stables and offices, connected with the main building by high battlemented walls. These were curved, so that the whole block was in the shape of a semicircle with a gigantic yew hedge, cut into pyramids and turrets, at its base. The pride of the Priory lay in its yew hedges and in the terraced garden at the back. This could be seen easily as the carriage wound up a gentle slope, for here the Lynde valley narrowed, and on one side the ground rose higher than is usual in that flat county. Three broad terraces built up with stone led down to the river. The massive walls were buttressed, each buttress surmounted by a weather-beaten statue. In the embrasures, great trees of myrtle and magnolia flourished, and there were quaint borders like the border at the mill, and scarred steps and balustrades, and a rose garden where the rose bushes were not stiff straight standards, but wandered at their sweet will. Upon none of these things had Zenobia yet had time to lay the desolating hands of reform.

The drive swept to the front of the house within the yew hedge, and round a smooth stretch of lawn that had once been a bowling-green. An ancient sun-dial stood opposite the hall door. The building was of the famous grey stone, but disfigured as far as the natural veining and pallid hue would permit, for Zen, in her ardour for cleanliness,

had scraped off the reddish brown lichen, had pruned away the ivy and clematis, and had ruthlessly uprooted the seedlings which the birds had sown in the crannies and on the tops of the old walls.

Two powdered footmen threw open the doors. There was a sound of voices and laughter as they were led into the large inner hall, which looked comfortable indeed, and picturesque, notwithstanding its odd jumble of the traditional and the essentially modern—of the Palais Royal and Plessis-les-Tours, and though the saucy little tables, the downy chairs, the gorgeous divans in Persian tapestry, the glowing carpets of velvet pile, the tambourines painted after Van Beers, and the porcelain monkeys hanging on to the screens, seemed at variance with the groined ceiling, the Gothic arches of the oak staircase, and the carved mantel with its coat of arms, which Zen firmly believed to be the rightful trophy of the Kenways.

The gentlemen had come in from shooting. Morse, looking very stately and handsome and somehow unlike himself in his rough gear, stood by the fireplace talking to Eustace, who was twirling a cigarette between his delicate fingers. Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp, in a Redfern costume, which subtly combined the æsthetic and the rural, and the most exquisite leather boots crossed in an attitude that revealed a modest isthmus of scarlet silk stocking, lounged on one of the divans. Miss Jo, very demure and sleek, made tea, with the Admiral and the well-got-up and extremely talkative "masher" in attendance. Zen herself, was seated upon a plush *pouf*, which was a triumph of Parisian art. It was intended to represent a large toadstool in the natural sickly yellow, and had green satin frogs clustering round the stem. She herself looked as incongruous as the toadstool, her healthy brown British face, her curly black crop, her square shoulders and substantial limbs being very much out of keeping with her French tea-gown of old gold plush, elaborately adorned with cascades of lace—a garment that Sarah Bernhardt might have appropriately worn in "Frou-Frou," and with her high-heeled embroidered shoes and old gold stockings.

There was a flutter among the group as Kooràli and her husband entered. Eustace languidly greeted his brother, and Zen embraced her sister-in-law with effusion. Morse did not at once come forward, but Kooràli had seen him the instant her glance swept the room. As he looked at the little face framed by a black hat with drooping feathers, he fancied that the slender form round which her soft dark draperies hung, it seemed to him like the draperies of no other woman, was even slenderer and more fragile than when he had last seen it not many days ago.

Some women, though they may be insignificant of stature, unassertive and absolutely unconscious of any wish to make an effect, are given, in recompense, a certain magnetic power of arresting and absorbing attention. As Kooràli stood and untwisted the lace scarf from her throat, she was, for the moment, the one object of interest to every eye in the room. It was as though the chief actress in the drama had appeared suddenly on the scene. There was about Kooràli that sug-

gestion of tragic story, lived through or yet to come, that mark of Destiny's cross, which one sees now and again in the face and form of man or woman, which is so unmistakable and so hard to explain or describe.

Morse shook hands gravely, almost silently, with Kooràli, and then drew back. Arden pushed forward a chair. Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp made her proper little speech, and the "masher," Mr. Erle, changed the tap of his conversation from lawn tennis to Lord and Lady Beaumont's place in the Highlands, where he had expected to meet Kooràli. He had once taken her down to dinner at their house in London.

Mr. Erle was a young man rich in conversational resources. He was in diplomacy, and was making fair progress, chiefly by virtue of his resolve always to talk on the right subject to the right person. He had just come from Copenhagen, and had ambitious hope of Washington. Kooràli was not long in observing that he had the proper tap of conversation always ready to turn on. He had chaff for Zen; he talked politics with a subdued deferential air when he was speaking to Morse; the air of one who says, "I know my future master; I may offer my meek suggestions, but of course I await his commands;" he conversed of hunting and old county families to Crichton, and thereby secured at once the good opinion of that scion of ancient line. He angled about a good deal with Kooràli, not being quite certain where to have her. He tried high life, because he understood that she was a friend of Lady Betty Morse; and then he tried Bohemia; and neither was successful, as he could see at a glance. Then he ventured on views of life itself; and after a while was lucky enough to have the conversation interrupted.

"You see we are refreshing ourselves," said Zenobia, in her abrupt voice. "Will you have some tea, or some sherry and bitters?"

Kooràli shook her head at the sherry and bitters, and asked for tea, which Morse brought her, and a few commonplaces were exchanged about the drive and the relative distance of Bromswold and the Grey Manor. Kooràli's voice was constrained.

"I beg to state that I am not drinking sherry and bitters because I like such stuff," continued Zen, "but because I've had neuralgia all day. It's nerves. Eustace thinks I haven't any right to have nerves. I've bought them from Jo—haven't I Jo? She's a Nevile-Beauchamp, and can spare them."

Eustace looked annoyed, and Crichton put in with a cheerful laugh—

"By Jove, if you want to make that sort of investment, my wife is the person to apply to."

"We've been in a muddle," said Zen. "Haven't we, Jo? The furniture people have only just gone away. I'm going to show you my diggings presently; I think they'll do. I have been having a battle with Mr. Morse," she went on in her discursive fashion, "because I'm a Conservative, and I've joined the Primrose League. Are you a Liberal or a Conservative, Kooràli? Will you give me your name? If I can get thirteen names, I can have the Priory made into a 'habi-

tation,' and then I shall get asked to such a lot of lovely functions. Mr. Morse, if you'd have a Republican League, and Lady Betty would start a pretty costume for it—say crowns and sceptres upside down, done in gold embroidery on an *eau de Nil* ground—something newer and more decided than primroses, I think I'd join your party and become a Radical."

There was a general laugh. Every one knew Lady Betty's royalist devotion. Morse laughed too; he never lost his sense of humour. Zenobia distinguished herself by some more remarks in the same strain.

"Come, Mrs. Kenway, is that your notion of political morality?" said Lord Arden, turning to her with a serio-comic expression. "There is no doubt that the tailor who invented the primrose skirt will be an influence in deciding the elections. The Admiral is grieved. He spent some time, while we were waiting at Dingle Corner for the Irish stew to arrive, in trying to persuade me that women were worthy of a vote, and you contradict all his arguments by insisting on being frivolous."

"No! Really!" exclaimed bland Mr. Nevile-Beauchamp—he of the drawl; Zen called him the "Interjectional Inquirer," because he never opened his mouth except to utter an ejaculation or to ask a question. "Ought women to have a vote?"

"I tell you what converted me," said the Admiral, a short man with a snarling voice and goggle eyes like those of a pug. "I was once staying in a country house where there were five men and seven ladies. The Channel tunnel question came under our quarter. The men, with the exception of myself, were for it. The ladies voted with me against it. Now, women are always sick."

"What?" asked the Inquirer, bending forward. He was a little deaf.

"Sick—sea-sick, don't you know," said the Admiral shortly. "The only argument I can see in favour of the tunnel is that it saves the crossing for people who get sick. Now, I said to myself, if women, who are always sea-sick, can be so disinterested in this one question, they are capable of having a voice in others; and that's how they got me round."

Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp purred her contribution to the conversation in her thin staccato voice, with her chin poked forward. The Admiral was *quite* in the wrong. He knew nothing at all about it. She was quite sure that no one nice could ever want women to have votes. She had been staying with a certain "Balloch" and "Lady Harriet." Lady Harriet was quite, *quite* crazy on "woman's rights." She wondered how any one could make a friend of Lady Harriet, who was certainly "very smart," but quite *the* ugliest woman and so strong-minded!

"I don't want to put women into Parliament," said Zen. "I think there are lots of things more interesting than that. In fact, I think the primrose people beastly slow, nearly as bad as my guardians. I should like to make something happen to me. Nothing has ever happened to me in my life, except getting married. I've got no line of fate. If you look at my hand, you'll see."

There was something comically wistful in her expression as she held out her square palm. Mr. Erle took it in his, and turned on the tap of chiromancy. Eustace rose. Zen looked at him.

"What are you beckoning to the Admiral for?" she asked. "Where are you going to take him and Mr. Morse?"

"We are going to play billiards. Come, Crichton."

The Admiral and Crichton followed him, also Mr. Neville-Beauchamp. Morse remained.

Zen's face flushed a little, and she heaved a petulant sigh as the door closed behind them. "That's Eustace's polite way of letting me knew that my conversation bores him. Well, we've got rid of the husbands, any way, that's one comfort. There must be a reaction, you know: flesh and blood can't stand it. You can't always keep your loins girt and your lamps burning."

Mrs. Neville-Beauchamp took up her crewel work in a protesting manner. Lord Arden laughed.

"Your views on matrimony are not any more encouraging than your political opinions, Mrs. Eustace."

"Well," returned Zen, frankly, "I don't know why girls are such blessed fools as to marry: do you, Kooràli? Some of them do it for a trousseau and to be independent of their guardians, and they're given very small change for their money. That's all I can say. The man gets everything, and the woman gets nothing except snubbing—unless she's a c—cat," and Zen stole a side glance at the Admiral's wife.

"The man gets everything?" repeated Lord Arden. "Let us consider the question. It's a very interesting one—to me, as a bachelor, at any rate. Let us see—what does the average man gain by marriage in comparison with the average woman?"

"A home," sententiously observed Mrs. Neville-Beauchamp.

"From which he is supposed to absent himself between breakfast and dinner," Lord Arden said.

"There's no place like home," said Zen sentimentally: and then recovering added, "So the husband seems to think, and that's why he likes any other place better."

"But come—what does the average man get by marriage?" Lord Arden persisted.

"The right to flirt without danger of an action for breach of promise," said Mr. Erle.

"But with the danger of a jolly good wigging from his wife," said Zen.

"I have heard it declared," Morse observed, "that he gets, if he is lucky, illusion converted into derision. But that isn't my definition."

"Can't we have Lord Arden's own views?" Kooràli asked.

"The man falls into bondage," said Lord Arden. "The woman emancipates herself. Here's a case. Take a girl—one of three or four sisters—who has been out several seasons. Other sisters are coming on. Dressing up has got to be a bore. She is tired of standing in the market. She marries. There is no further necessity to dress up, for

a practical end. She has got her promotion. She has got her liberty. She can go to the theatre with a pleasant little party of men and women, and sup at the Orleans, without her husband. She has got pin-money, settlements, new dresses, and a house of her own. We needn't mention love. I suppose that passes."

"My! ain't we cynical!" Zen exclaimed. "What wisdom to be sure! Haven't we studied the question, to be sure? Bachelors' wives and maids' children are well managed, we all know!"

"Women are narrow," pursued Arden composedly. "They only care for their own occupations. They don't take the trouble to grasp their husband's interests. The husband goes home. What does he find? A stupid wife who can't or won't talk to him on his subjects. Ten to one she is dying to go out and show off a new dress. She ain't contented to go out alone. She wants her husband—not for the pleasure of his society, but because she wants him to bring her home again. And supposing that they go in for a domestic evening, two armchairs by the fire and so forth. He sits down in one. Then, as I said, what is there to talk about? There soon comes this sort of feeling," and he comically drew his hand across his throat.

"I don't know anything about it," said Morse with an air of forced gaiety. "Betty and I never get a chance of an evening to ourselves. Never shall, I suppose. I don't know what you are talking about."

"There's something in what Arden says," exclaimed Mr. Erle, who seemed impressed by the view of the question. "Why do we marry? Because we are fools. Mrs. Eustace Kenway is right. It's like duck shooting. See what one goes through for the sake of one duck—and when you've got him! It's the same thing. I fall in love. I propose. Why? She is wearing a colour I admire, or we've been dancing together to a waltz I like, or I've got a little too much champagne on board!"

"We haven't heard a word of Mrs. Crichton Kenway's views on the great matrimonial question, and the relative gains and losses of man and woman," Arden suggested.

Morse was drawing out of the conversation, but he checked himself now, and he looked at Koorâli, who started a little and saw that all eyes were on her.

"Oh, please leave me out," she pleaded, quite earnestly. "I don't even speak the language."

"My dear, what nonsense!" Zenobia cried. "Whatever do you mean?"

"I don't understand," Arden said.

"I do," said Morse. "Quite."

CHAPTER XIX.

"TOO EARLY SEEN UNKNOWN, AND KNOWN TOO LATE."

YES, he understood her, quite. He knew exactly all the meaning of her words; and he thought the simple words expressed her meaning with precision and fulness. She did not speak the language of London society, on that serious, sad question of man and woman's association. She was made to be happy and to give out happiness; and Morse knew too well that she was not happy. She was made to be the fond, devoted wife of a true-hearted husband, to whom she could turn with eyes of love, to whom she could look up with generous admiration. The marriage question could hardly seem to her all jocular. Morse began to find that he was all unconsciously growing to understand her but too well. He began to find that he was getting into the way of turning his eyes on her and waiting with deep interest for what she was to say. This had been going on with him for some time indeed, but he was now beginning to grow conscious of it. He found himself watching over her life, if one might put it in that way. She began to occupy a large spreading space in his thoughts. This troubled him, although there was a sweetness in it too for the over-busy much pre-occupied statesman.

Kooràli's protestation of her inability to speak the language and Morse's declaration that he understood what she meant, put a stop to the discussion on the relative advantages of matrimony to man and man's mate. The tea-drinking was over; the little group was at liberty to disperse.

The open air was tempting to most of the guests. Mr. Erle went with Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp into the conservatory to get some stephanotis; Morse and Kooràli found themselves alone on the lower terrace. They walked up and down slowly. It was very still and peaceful here, and the air was full of the fragrance of myrtle and late roses.

A dream-like sense of content stole over Kooràli. "I *will* be happy," she seemed to be whispering to herself, and her heart went on speaking while they paced almost the length of the terrace in silence. "Why should I not be glad that I am near him? Why should I be afraid? A woman has not any need to be afraid when she has to deal with a man like him. I am not afraid or ashamed, now. There would be shame if he were not the most loyal man who lives. He is the truest and the most loyal. I know him and I honour him. I could look into his eyes as he might look into mine, without a shadow of shame, for our souls would understand each other."

Thinking of this, she did turn her dark, melancholy eyes towards him. His were downcast. She had never before seen him so grave. There was a curious expression on his face—a look stern, pure, and resolute, yet unutterably sad. Before she could turn her eyes away

he looked suddenly round, as if he had become conscious of her gaze and of her thoughts. Their eyes met. His look seemed for one moment to cling to hers, as if he were dumbly beseeching her pardon, dumbly assuring her that she might rely on him to be silent and loyal. In that instant their souls faced each other fairly. They were no longer groping in darkness. Then they both looked away. The sense of nearness to him which she felt was a rush of joy. Of course he would never tell her what was in his heart. This she knew, as she knew her own heart. He would never tell her that he loved her. He would never ask her if she loved him. A naked sword was placed between them, like that which the youth Aladdin in the Arabian tale set with his own hand between him and the princess he adored. Kooràli knew that in word and deed they would be no more to each than the merest acquaintances—less than friends. It might indeed be that this was their farewell. But no matter. They knew. At the moment there was one and the same picture before the mind and memory of each—that parting scene in Australian waters and the Australian dawn, long ago.

Kooràli's lips parted in a long sigh. For a moment or two she hardly knew where she was, or what had happened to her. She was back in the Australian dawn.

Presently Morse spoke in a deep moved voice. "We understand each other; there is nothing more to say; now or at any other time. It's a great misfortune. We have got to bear it."

"Yes," she answered simply; and then the woman in her spoke. "Still, I am glad to know," she said; and there was silence again.

"Kooràli," Morse said abruptly. The sound of her Christian name, which he so seldom uttered, thrilled her with a sense of delight—all the more perhaps because the emotion in it was held so determinedly in check. "There is something else I do want to talk about. I asked you to think over the idea of a colonial appointment for your husband. I had one in view, and yesterday I heard again from Lord Coulmont, in whose gift it is. Your husband may have the offer of a governorship in Farnesia, one of the newly annexed islands. It is the governorship of all the islands, in fact. Coulmont authorizes me to speak to him. I could not do so till I had spoken to you again; but I ought to write to him to-morrow. We are political enemies, but we are personal friends, and he has promised me."

Kooràli was silent, her lips pressed tightly together, her eyes downcast, in deep thought. He could see that her face, under the shadow of her black feathers, had got very white.

"The climate is fairly good," Morse continued in the same level tones, "more healthy than that of South Britain. I once spent a few weeks there. The society is fairly good also; and there is capital shooting and a summer residence in the hills. There would be plenty to do of a pleasant kind. I think your husband would like it. And for you"—his voice changed suddenly—"it would, perhaps, be better."

Still Keoràli did not turn towards him or speak. She was afraid to speak. She felt that if she tried to raise her voice she must break down.

"There is the alternative of trusting to what I can do for you in England," Morse said. "You won't mind my speaking so frankly? I know that Mr. Kenway depended more or less on the South Britain Government, and that he has no great private fortune."

Keoràli shook her head. She seemed to wish to speak, but the words did not come. He saw that she was suffering.

"There is one thing I implore you to take into your mind and your heart," he said earnestly. "In any way that I can serve you, I have a right to do so. Don't you know there are bonds, relationships, in which that is the only right which can be claimed, and which ought not to be denied?" He waited a moment, and then went on. "After the elections, it may be in my power to help my friends, but there is no certainty about it. The political situation may be such that with my convictions I may be unable to accept responsibility even if it is thrust upon me. If war takes place, I should be practically powerless—for a time. If, on the other hand, the war party is in the minority—well, I must come into office. But I don't think that likely, in the least. I am bound in justice to put this view of the case before your husband. His own judgment will guide him, and perhaps your influence."

Keoràli spoke out now, and answered steadily. "I will ask him—I will beg him to accept the appointment and take me out of England."

The strained look on Morse's face relaxed. Her decision was evidently a relief to him.

"Tell me that I am right," Keoràli said, and there was a passionate trembling in her voice. "Tell me that you think it will be better for me to go away. Tell me that you'd rather——"

She stopped suddenly, stirred by the expression of his face to a feeling of the keenest self-abasement. How could she dare to make duty more difficult to him and to herself? His face told her what he was suffering. It might have been cut out of iron but for the eyes; and the intense pity, the struggling tenderness, the deep anguish in them, were almost more than she could bear. Neither spoke for some moments. She knew that in this forced self-repression lay his only strength. She stopped abruptly in her walk.

"No," she exclaimed, "I won't ask you—anything—except to help me to go away. I'm glad to think you can help me to do that. You will speak to Crichton to-night? You will urge him, for his own sake, to take what Lord Cranmont offers you. Oh yes, I know—I know how good you are—how true. If he refuses, then I will beg him to take it—for my sake."

Then she moved away. He joined her, and they mounted the stone steps without a word. When they had reached the upper terrace, she stood for a minute leaning against the time-worn balustrade, as if to take breath or to nerve herself before going into the world again. She

leaned over the ivy-grown railing, a fragile little black figure, her head turned away from him, her chin upraised. The sun had set, but her face was outlined against the red glow that shone across the river. He saw the muscles in the slender throat quivering, and the great dark eyes grow larger and fuller, as though tears were welling in them. All at once, she made a sudden movement, and faced him with bright, dilated eyes, and lips hardened into a conventional smile. Her little laugh rang out clearly. She had taken up her part again, and the thought translated itself into words.

"I don't think that I'm a person who goes in for theatrical effect," she said lightly; "but what strikes me most about England, in contrast to Australia, is that it's dramatic. People group themselves well, and the background is nearly always appropriate to the varied situations of civilized life."

"Are you thinking that Mrs. Eustace has managed some effective grouping?" he asked, falling into her mood with an effort.

"It's always the same," she said. "I have been haunted, almost ever since I came to England, by an odd fancy that the curtain would fall directly. This is like a scene in a play—one might imagine the footlights down there," and she pointed towards the river—"a play we saw this season; do you remember? There was a terraced garden, in the second act, and there was just the right alternation of pretty drawing-room comedy and of emotional interest. It was very pretty, and it was very like real life—the afternoon tea, and the dresses, like Zen's; and the smart things that were said, and the tragedy which had the stage all to itself when the right time came. But no one ever forgot to say clever things, and the women always took care that their draperies fell becomingly."

She paused, but Morse did not laugh or make any jesting remark. She drew herself away from the balustrade.

"I wonder if you could reach one or two of those roses," she said, pointing to a cluster of Maréchal Niel, which hung from the wall close to where they stood. "I should like to wear them to-night, if you will gather them for me."

He did as she asked, and gave the roses to her. As she held out her hands, he saw that they were trembling. She clasped the flowers tightly.

"Thank you," she said. "You see, I am like the people in the play. There's always the dressing up to be thought of. And the curtain will fall on me—on this sort of life, at any rate, if Crichton goes to the islands—what are they called? I must make the most of what opportunities are left me to be brilliant and worldly."

Her laugh, in which there was a false uncertain note, smote him to the very soul. He felt at that moment as one might feel who saw his best-beloved child suffering from a blow he had unknowingly dealt. She was so like a child still. She went into the house with her roses, and he loitered on the terrace for a few minutes. Then the dressing-gong summoned him also within.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. DOBITO ADMONISHES NATIONS.

KOORÀLI came down to dinner in a dress which had been designed for her by a royal academician, and which had created quite a sensation at the great London party where she had first worn it. It was a wonderful arrangement of rich, clinging Eastern stuff, of a pale yellow, and heavy gold embroidery; and it was fashioned in a manner quite different from that of any modern garment. The draperies hung with that grace for which the Australian beauty was much celebrated. No stiffened bodice disfigured her form, but an embroidered scarf was cunningly twisted round and round her bust, the white neck and slender throat clasped by a band of gold rising above its folds, the arms showing bare to the shoulders. She wore Morse's roses at her waist. There was something striking and original about the dress. It had been very much admired and quoted, and it harmonized with her clear paleness, her delicate features, and deep dark eyes. There was no particular reason why she should wear it upon this occasion, except that it seemed somehow to suit her mood and to signalize the closing of a chapter in her life.

Perhaps she had never been less herself than upon this evening. She was not given to saying hard, brilliant things, or indeed to talking much in general company. To-night, however, she talked a great deal, and laughed and made keen little speeches, which hurt Morse like the thrusts of a knife. He understood so well what she intended that he should understand; and more. It was a poor, pitiful piece of bravery.

Crichton was pleased in his malign, self-glorifying way. He was anxious that the impression she had made upon Morse should be deepened during Lady Betty's absence. He had a nervous dread of Lady Betty's interference. He watched Morse with the eyes of a tracker, and saw that he was preoccupied, and that he constantly looked at Kooràli. Crichton interpreted these looks by smoking-room theories. He himself only knew one manner of admiring a pretty woman. He was not displeased. He meant to work Morse's admiration to his own advantage. He also admired Kooràli in that dress and in that mood.

Zen was very gorgeous. She twinkled with diamonds and silver embroidery. Her train was of brocade, with *fleurs-de-lis* upon it, outlined in silver thread. Her shoes glistened like Cinderella's glass slippers, only they were much larger. She awed and delighted Mr. Dobito, who duly made his appearance, clad in checked trousers, a long blue coat with brass buttons, and a high collar and neckcloth in good old style. Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp thought that he looked singularly out of place in Zen's magnificent pale yellow drawing-room. She thought the fox terrier out of place too, when it was brought to be

exhibited. But soon she saw that a great county lady, who was Zen's neighbour and a guest this evening, delighted in the fox terrier, asking many questions as to its breed and capabilities, and was on most intimate terms with Mr. Dobito. So she changed her mind, and whispered to Mr. Erle that it was really very picturesque.

The dinner was over; the women had gone into the drawing-room. Mr. Dobito was not sorry. He was of Dr. Johnson's way of thinking. He liked to fold his legs and have his talk out, and one could not well have his talk out where there were ladies. They would expect to be allowed their say too; and then they would contradict; and they would not understand. A wise man does not talk to women, though he may sometimes condescend to talk at them. Mr. Dobito was a very wise man. He was really very clever, shrewd, and sound; but he loved to hear himself talk, and he indulged in paradox to show how clever he was. He had been taught by his own class to consider himself an oracle. The gentry of the county admired his shrewd sense, his thorough honesty, and his straight riding in the hunting-field, and they were amused by his oddities and indulged them. This evening Mr. Dobito was very happy. He had been brought to talk to Mr. Morse and Lord Arden, and he meant to justify his reputation. He admired Morse; thought Morse and he were the two really able men in the country; considered Morse almost equal to himself in natural capacity, but wanting of course in years and experience.

The claret was passed round. Mr. Dobito smiled condescendingly at it, but would have none of it. "No, thank you, Mr. Kenway. None of your new-fangled rubbish for *me*. They *used* to say 'twere only Frenchies that drank claret, and that was because they were not brought up to anything better. I'll stick to the port."

He stuck to the port, which he found excellent, which was excellent. Cigarettes were lighted. Of course hunting had been discussed, as was natural in Lyndfordshire, but Mr. Dobito oracularly closed that subject.

"Hunting is a very good sport for him as knows his country and knows his nag; but for a middling rider and a middling nag, why, *I* say there isn't much in it. And that's the truth."

Then came some talk of the foreshadowed war. Mr. Dobito was entirely with Morse on that subject. War would simply ruin the farmers he declared; they only wanted *that* on the top of the abominable strikes and holidays, and the extra burdens. Admiral Nevile-Beauchamp was against war on a different ground, concerning which also Morse agreed with him. We were not prepared, the gallant Admiral held. "Our ships won't float, sir; our guns would burst; the short-service has played the devil with the red-jackets."

Eustace fixed his eye-glass, and was languidly for battle. "Heard all that sort of thing before, you know; always hearing it. You sailors and soldiers are always grumbling; bad as the farmers. Give Englishmen a chance of fighting, and they'll show you they can lick the foreigners yet—against any odds, by Jove!" Then he dropped his eye-glass, having settled the question. He dropped his eye-glass,

as the owner of a castle might drop the portcullis in the brave days of old to signify that he could hold no further parley.

"Fighting the foreigner means starving the farmer," said Mr. Dobito. "They don't all believe that. I heard a farmer say that what we wanted was a good old war like the Crimean war, when wheat went over a hundred shillings a quarter. But you know, sir"—Mr. Dobito's voice became deep and emphatic—"there's bound to be what my learned friend 'ud call a reaction; and I mind when wheat went down—after that very war—down as low as my boots."

"The burdens on the farmer are increasing, I suppose, Mr. Dobito?" Lord Arden struck in.

This gave Mr. Dobito his chance. His time had come, and he knew it. Now he was going to talk. He stretched out his long legs, took another glass of port, then put his hands into his pockets and surveyed the company with the wise man's tranquil and superior smile. Then he began—

"Burdens on the farmer increasing, my Lord? Yes, I should think they were. I am glad you put that question while Mr. Morse is here. To-morrow or next day he may be—well, the master of the hounds let us say; the Westminster Parliament pack." And Mr. Dobito smiled at his own humour. "Now I am going to give you a little ditty in prose. I'm going to tell you all about the burdens which we poor farmers have to carry on our backs now, and which we hadn't to bear when I began to exist, nor for many years after. A gentleman like my learned friend Mr. Morse here"—Mr. Dobito considered it only becoming to speak thus respectfully of a possible Prime Minister—"like my learned friend Mr. Morse here, wants to get to the right side of affairs, let us suppose——"

"The head of affairs?" Mr. Erle murmured, with a bland tentative suggestion of a joke. *On ne rit pas*, as the French parliamentary reports were occasionally in the habit of saying when an orator's attempted pleasantry in the Chamber missed fire. Mr. Dobito frowned; not at the jest, but at the interruption.

"At the right side of affairs," Mr. Dobito went on with a certain sternness of manner, calculated to discourage further interruption, "Well, what do I do? I stick him up at my gate, and put somebody by his side who knows all the people hereabouts and the ways of the place. At nine o'clock, not before, they begin to pass along. First you see a very decent-looking man, with a clerical sort of appearance; he wears a long black coat, a waistcoat a little open, showing a neat, well-starched shirt." Mr. Dobito's long upper lip lengthened, and he expanded his chest and stroked the long loose ends of his crimped neckcloth. "And he has a pair of very respectable gloves. 'Who is this?' says my learned friend."

Mr. Dobito paused, and waved his hand as if it held a pipe and were pointing with the stem to the imaginary passer-by.

No one of course presumed to anticipate the answer. Mr. Dobito went on—

"Says my interpreter, 'This is the village schoolmaster.' 'Who pays him?' asks my learned friend? 'The farmer pays him.' Very good. Now there comes along a very respectable lady, looking as if she had seen better days. She is dressed fairly up to the fashion; lumping out very large behind from the waist." Mr. Dobito pushed away his chair, and gave a pantomimic representation of the swaying motion produced by a dress-improver. "She has a pair of spectacles on, and she goes by with a very mincing and formal step. 'Who is this?' says you. 'Why, that is the village schoolmistress.' 'And who pays her?' 'Why, the farmer, of course.' Then after her come two strapping lasses, one with very high heels to her boots; perhaps the other with low shoes and buckles. 'Who be these?' asks my learned friend. 'These be the assistant-schoolmistresses.' 'And who pays them?' 'Oh, oh! the farmer pays them. Who but he?'"

Mr. Dobito seated himself again, looked round the company, and took breath. He wanted the effect of his descriptions to sink deep. Then he resumed his prose ditty.

"Now, see this hurly-burly looking fellow with a big fierce beard. You see him taking notes with a pencil. 'Who is this?' says you—says my learned friend, Mr. Morse. 'This is the school-attendance officer, looking for little lads whose fathers are too poor to let them spend their time in school.' 'Who pays him?' 'Why, the farmer.' Then a chap comes tramping stately down the road, with buttons shining like silver, and his nose in the air. 'Who is this great person?' you ask. 'This—oh, this is the village policeman.' 'And who pays him?' 'Why, the farmer.' Look at this portly man, thirteen or fourteen stone in weight he must be, surely; he seems as if he had pretty well enough to eat at all times, now, don't he? This is the relieving officer. 'And who pays him?' 'The farmer.' Just stand out of the way of this one who comes sitting on the wrong side of the drive of a cart, and his wife with him on the other; they are a pretty heavy pair, and I tell you the weight of them makes the springs bump down. Do you know who that man is? That's the inspector of nuisances. 'Who pays him?' 'The farmer, of course.'"

Mr. Dobito was dramatic as well as methodical in his way of description. He assumed that each announcement as to the paymaster would be a fresh revelation to the audience, and he made the announcement with a burst.

"Now, look at this gentleman driven sitting down in a very superior turn-out; he wears a pair of blue spectacles to keep the dust out. 'Who is he?' 'Well, he is the surveyor of roads.' 'And who pays him?' 'The farmer pays him.' See who comes after him—this man with the tall shiny chimney-pot hat and a fine broadcloth coat. See, he knocks at every door as he goes along. 'Who is he?' 'Well, that's the rate-collector, calling to get the last penny every one has left.' 'And who pays him?' 'Why, the farmer.' Good. But just turn your eyes this way now for a bit. Do you see this poor old fellow, dressed not so fashionably by long odds, with a pair of old cord

breeches, old leather leggings, a coat that has seen some service and lost its colour in it, and a particularly shabby old white hat? He has an ash stick in his hand, this poor old chap, and he is jogging home to get some comfort, if he can, out of a glass of beer. 'What old bloke is that?' says my learned friend. 'Ah, but that is old Steve Dobito, the farmer, the man who lives on the land and pays double the rates of any other man in the parish.'"

This was the climax. Where Corporal Trim would have dropped his hat, Mr. Dobito poured out another glass of port. He looked round silent on the company.

Morse spoke first. "The farmer will have to carry some more burdens soon, I suppose, Mr. Dobito? A dead Englishman and a dead foreigner on his back. The statesmen get them killed—our own poor fellows and the others; and the farmers pay for the work."

"You come in, Mr. Morse, and don't give us any war," Mr. Dobito said. "We look to you."

CHAPTER XXI.

"AND MAY THIS WORLD GO WELL WITH YOU."

THE fame of Zen's improvements and decorations had gone abroad among the neighbours; and when Lady Clarence—Mr. Dobito's friend and the lady who admired fox terriers—expressed a wish to see Mrs. Eustace Kenway's "diggings," there was an adjournment to Zen's boudoir while the men were in the dining-room.

The upholsterers had only just left it, and it had the appearance of a newly finished glove-box. The walls were of pale blue brocade, and the ceiling was satin, quilted and puckered, with a wonderful lamp hanging from its centre by gilt chains, up which green porcelain frogs were crawling. The draperies were all of pale blue plush; the chairs and sofas were covered with plush, and were of fantastic shapes, after the order of the toadstool in the hall. All sorts of funny modern knick-knacks adorned the room. Dresden mirrors, gilt baskets, grotesque china monstrosities, odd little coloured glass lamps. There were no books, or pieces of work, or any of the artistic fripperies which women like to collect. Zen seated herself squarely upon her plush sofa and surveyed the whole with naïve complacency.

"I must say I like it," she said. "I told you that I knew how to make my little self comfortable. Didn't I now? It's the only thing worth doing. What else is there? It's so jolly satisfactory to make one's self comfortable."

"But when it's done," said Lady Clarence, who was a sportswoman of Spartan habits, and liked nothing better than roughing it.

"Oh, then, there's the satisfaction," returned Zen, and she sighed. "*I* don't find much in life, except that kind of thing—eating and drinking and being amused. Some people are cut out for romance and

sentiment, don't you know? Like you, Kooràli. But you and I, Lady Clarence, aren't that sort. Are we now?

Lady Clarence did not seem quite to fancy being set in a category with Zen. She only put up her eye-glass and inspected the frogs on the lamp-chains, supposing vaguely that they must feel a little out of their element.

"This is my daylight room," continued Zen. "Now, I'm going to show you my night one. I had the satin and plush dyed to suit my complexion. Do you like it?" she asked with conscious triumph, as after having passed through a glove-box wardrobe room, she pushed open the doors into her bedroom and dressing-room. These were dainty nests indeed, lined with rose-coloured satin and draped in lace, with the most wonderful inlaid toilette table and long three-sided mirror, framed in silver, and with a special altar consecrated to silver-backed brushes of all shapes and sizes—there were twenty of them, Zen announced with delight, and it was matter for speculation how many of them could by any possibility be employed upon the little close-cropped head—and to powder puffs, silver-handled curling-irons, and frizzing apparatus.

Lady Clarence laughed good-humouredly. "This is the oldest part of the house, isn't it?" she asked.

"Hundreds and hundreds of years old," said Zen. "You might go through the floor for twopence-halfpenny. It don't look old now though, does it—or dirty? It was just *as* grimy! And all hung with tapestry, and done up with queer carving. I had that cleared away pretty smart."

"I think I'd have kept the tapestry," said Lady Clarence, with a little laugh.

They proceeded on their tour of inspection; but Kooràli lingered. She had thrown back the venetians, and was looking out of the open window upon the scene below. There was the wide terrace, with its bit of black lawn and the grey balustrades and solemn yew hedges on either side; and then, far below, the silvery line of river, and the low dark bank and ghostly trees shrouded in haze rising on the opposite side. Beyond that lay the flat meadows covered with thick white mist that looked as if it were the sea, and with just the dim outlines of a village above it, like distant land.

When the rest had gone, Kooràli sank upon the floor and kneeled with her arms against the ledge and her chin upon them. She was in a strange excited state, her heart was quivering and she felt sick with the terror of something impending. All this seemed part of a dream. She wondered what Morse would say to her husband. She wondered how Crichton would regard the situation—if he would agree to leave England. To leave England! The thought seemed to clutch her heart, and she uttered a stifled cry at the pain it gave her. The conviction swept over her with full force that she had never known till late months the exquisite joy and the exquisite pain which life can hold and love can bring. For the misery, too, was exquisite—there

was no deadness, no blankness in it. But to go away—to be alone always with her husband . . .!

She shuddered all over. The phase of exaltation and glory in a love which seemed to her the outcome of her nature, the fruit of her very soul, had gone, as phases of the kind vanish, and she had now a sense as of guilt and shame. She seemed to see her little children's faces. It was horrible, it was unnatural. The suffocating sobs shook her, but she wouldn't let them have vent. "Oh! why can't I fight—and fight—and get the better of it?" she whispered fiercely to herself. "It's wrong—it's wicked! It's because I'm a bad woman—that I hate—*hate* him so. And he's my husband! Oh! God is cruel to us wives! Why does He let us bind ourselves when we don't know—when we *can't* know? Why does He let the feeling grow, and cheat us into the fancy that it's the noblest and the most beautiful—till it's like death to pluck it out? Oh! I'd rather die—I can't—I can't!"

She did not know how long she stayed at the window. It was only a few minutes perhaps. She got calm again, and the trembling ceased. She did not want to sob now and cry out. She was still kneeling, when Zen's beads and bangles clinked in the room, and Zen stole up to the window, standing behind her, and looking out on to the mist and the silvery band of water and the black outlines of the yews. The mist was a little less dense, or the lamps in the village across the water had been lighted, for one or two shone below like beacon lights on the shore.

Zen did not speak for a moment. Presently she said, "I think it's queer, that. It strikes me, don't you know? We on this side, and they on that one. The poor rough creatures in those cottages, and we frivolous modern people; and this room—and everything. There's only the river between—but such a gulf! *They* can't picture our lives, and we don't know theirs."

Kooràli did not answer.

Zen went on, in her abrupt yet reflective way. "There's that old bridge, it's Saxon. And the Knights Templars used to look out on that very river and the meadows. It's b-beastly queer."

She slipped down on the carpet beside her sister-in-law. Then she looked out at the night, and back into the rose-lined room, with its silver mirrors and the table with all the brushes, and shook her head. "It isn't worth much, after all," she said, with an odd, passionate quaver in her voice. "I'd give it all—all—if I could be loved for my very own self. You're better off than I am, Kooráli."

Kooràli turned with a quick gesture of sympathy, and clasped Zen's hand. It was the first time she had ever felt so closely drawn towards Zen; and now the pity and compassion which went from her were a relief to her surcharged heart. Zen's pathetic declaration of loneliness and disappointment found its echo in her own soul. The tears gushed from her eyes. Presently Zen put her other hand on Kooràli's cheek and turned her face round. The light from a lamp in the room fell upon it and showed Zen a great tear on her eyelashes.

"You're crying," exclaimed Zen. "I knew quite well that you had the taste of ashes between your teeth this evening, though you tried so jolly well to make everybody believe it was all apples and roses. Has Crichton been bullying you?"

"No," answered Kooràli faintly.

"Is it money?" pursued Zen. "I guessed that Crichton must be pretty hard up. His tailor wouldn't give him tick. A man must be hard up when his tailor won't give him tick. Never mind how I know—I do. Look here, Kooràli. If it's money, just you let me lend you a helping hand. I needn't tell Eustace, you know."

"No, no," said Kooràli hastily, "I couldn't. You are very kind, Zen; but, indeed, I couldn't let you help me in that way. And, besides, it's not money. It's nothing—nothing that I can talk about, dear. I'm just a little melancholy this evening, and—I didn't mean you to see it. Never mind me; tell me about yourself. I'm so sorry that things are wrong with you; but, perhaps, it is all a mistake. And you are very fond of Eustace, dear. Nothing matters much if one only loves one's husband."

"But I don't," said Zen slowly, her round rosy face paling and becoming hard and old-looking as she gazed straight before her out beyond the river. "I did love him. I was idiotically fond of him, though I knew he was a mass of selfishness; but I could not help it. You see, that's the worst of never caring for any one all one's life. When one does, it's a bad job."

Kooràli pressed Zen's hand closer, and there was a little silence.

"I did love him," repeated Zen, "but that was all over before many months. It was over when I found out that he had only married me for my money. There, I'd cut out my tongue before I'd tell that to the Family!"

"Oh, Zen, perhaps you are mistaken," said Kooràli.

"No, I'm not. I found it out. I found out that he had been in love with a woman in Florence who was married, a friend of mine"—the scorn in Zen's voice was tragic—"who wanted to do him a good turn and get my fortune for him. I suppose she thought it wouldn't make any difference; but it did," cried Zen, with a flash of triumph. "Eustace may be selfish, and he doesn't care for me; but he is a gentleman. He quarrelled with her and took me away. Then, afterwards, I began to see how bored he was, and I partly guessed, and my step-mother told me the rest. And when two and two are added together they generally make four," remarked Zen. "I didn't want much telling. They think I'm a lump of pap, and no one ever suspects me of being able to see through a brick wall. But that's my way. I'm deceptive. I'm noticing all the time that I'm rattling on by the yard, and I've noticed Eustace. I can read his thoughts.

"It was wicked of your step-mother; it was horrible!" cried Kooràli indignantly.

"Yes, I must say I think it was low," returned Zen. "But, then, I told you she was pretty bad form; even I can see that. She funked

afterwards, and begged me not to let Eustace know. She said she had done it for my good. She need not have been afraid. *I* wasn't likely to tell Eustace; I was too proud for that. But I felt bad enough, I can tell you; and I flew out at him—about nothing in particular. I stormed and raved: and then, when I couldn't hold myself in any longer, I rushed away up into the hills. Oh, you needn't have minded my seeing you cry. Cry! Why, *I've* cried cataracts."

"Oh, poor Zen!" murmured Kooràli.

"Never mind! I've got a happy faculty for throwing things off. It's all right as long as I keep going on like a steam engine. It was up in the hills, above Glion," she went on in her hard bitter way. "I lay on the ground and cried and shrieked. I dare say the people in the vineyard thought I was mad. So I was, for a bit. Then I picked myself up. When I got back, Eustace was smoking cigarettes and reading 'Autour du Mariage.' He asked me, with the politeness of a Spanish Don, if I would mind, when I was quite calm, stating my wishes clearly, so that he might comply with them. I could have stabbed him; I was wild with rage. My blood boiled so that it sent me into a fever. I went to bed for a week; my face swelled. I wouldn't speak to Eustace. After a week I got up. There was a dance in the hotel that night. It was the first time I had met Lord Arden since my marriage——" Zen stopped abruptly. "Well, that was the end of it all," she added, "and I don't mean to cave in. And you mustn't either, Kooràli. I should think Lady Clarence had seen the house by this time."

She got up, and Kooràli rose too. Zen's little burst of confidence had done Kooràli good. It had brought her back to reality, and yet the reality, when she thought of her fate trembling in the balance of Crichton's self-interested wishes, seemed a ghastly dream.

The gentlemen came in very soon after Kooràli and Zen had returned to the drawing-room. Crichton and Morse were together, and Lord Arden and Mr. Dobito brought up the rear. Mr. Dobito, a little elated by Eustace's port and the wrongs of the ratepayers, was taken in hand by Lady Clarence, and presently Lord Arden spied Zen's banjo in a corner, and brought it to her.

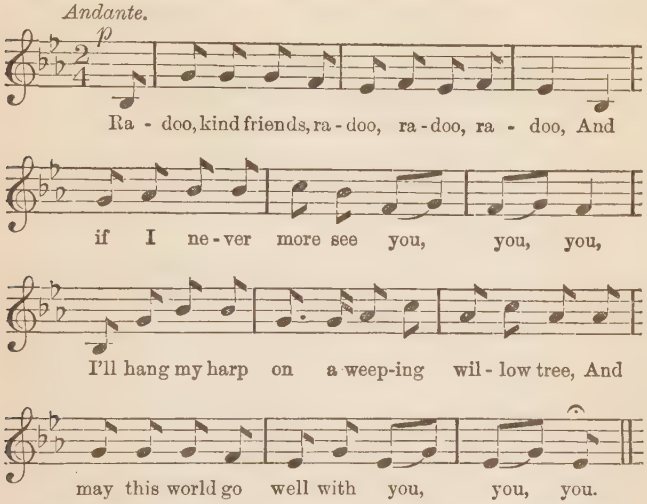
It was a very magnificent banjo, like everything of Zen's. It was got up in richly chased silver, and it looked very new and shiny, and matched Zen's embroidery as, seated in a plush chair, with her feet on a gilt footstool, she held it on her lap.

"I can only sing one song," she said, "and I can't play anything but two breakdowns. I mix them up together because I think they sound more imposing, don't you know? And I'm only going to play because it isn't good manners to refuse when you're asked, don't you see?"

Zen played her breakdowns, and then the song was insisted upon, and she sang it with an odd look at Eustace as she thrummed the accompaniment. Eustace was watching her; and, indeed, there was something comic and pathetic about Zen as she sat in all her finery

fingering her banjo, with her elbows squared and the hard look of emotion kept under still on her face.

It was a wild little American negro song. Her voice was sweet and had a melancholy note in it, and there was something very quaint and tender about the song. It had a refrain, which ran thus:—


Andante.
p
Ra - doo, kind friends, ra - doo, ra - doo, ra - doo, And
if I ne - ver more see you, you, you,
I'll hang my harp on a weep-ing wil - low tree, And
may this world go well with you, you, you.

Nothing could be more sweet, simple, and pathetic than the air. The last word "you" was repeated with a sinking sad sound "you—you—you!"—a plaintiveness like that of an evening breeze. There was something inexpressibly touching in this tender, fond little parting prayer. So Kooràli thought at least. She found the tears coming into her eyes; she did not well know why. She found herself repeating, in lowest tone, the words "and may this world go well with you—you—you!" As she listened she saw that Morse was listening too, and was apparently absorbed in the song. When it was done he came to Zenobia.

"Now, where did you get that song?" he asked. "Do you know that it is a genuine plantation song—a real nigger melody; not a thing got up for a London or even a New York music hall? I have not heard it for years and years. We used to hear it down south during the American war. The fugitive slaves used to come into our camps and take refuge there, and they used to get round a fire and sing that song. 'Radoo' is the plantation attempt at 'adieu.' I do wish you would sing it again."

Zenobia positively blushed with delight and pride at the success of her song.

"I learnt it from a Southern States woman in the *pension* where I found Jo. Didn't I, Jo? She said the niggers sang it on the plantation at sundown."

Zen sang it again. Kooràli and Morse listened.

"That's all," said Zen. She got up, and Lord Arden took the banjo from her, and presently followed her to another part of the room.

"I like your song," he said; "and you have a very pretty voice, and should always sing simple things like that. It suits you."

Zen looked at him in her straight wistful way.

"Do you think it would be better if I were simpler all round? Not so much of this kind of thing?" And she touched the fringe of beads which made a sort of jingling girdle round her waist. "Come, honour bright!"

Arden laughed. "Honour bright!" he repeated. "I don't object to that sort of thing. It provides employment for poor work-girls; but I shouldn't mind if a little of it were converted into amusement for them."

"Oh, I know," said Zen. "Cheap homes and reading-rooms, and entertainments and all that. I'm going to start an entertainment room here, and I want you to help me. I don't mean the banjo sandwiched between prayers. I'd keep them separate. I've no patience with the people who think they have only got to put on their Sunday faces to fly straight up to heaven like a paper kite. That wasn't what I meant, Lord Arden. I was thinking of myself."

Lord Arden was at that moment thinking of Kooràli, towards whom his eyes had turned. She was sitting some little distance off, quite still, but with an anxious look on her face. She was, in truth, absorbed in a low-toned conversation carried on between Morse and her husband, a word of which she caught now and then. It was on the political situation; the question of the appointment had not as yet, she fancied, been broached.

"Kooràli is not simple. She is very complicated," said Zen quickly.

"Your sister-in-law is not a happy woman," returned Lord Arden unguardedly.

Zen drew a long audible breath. "Ah, you have found that out?" she said.

"I have let myself slip into an indiscretion," replied Arden. "I have no reason to suppose anything of the kind."

"Oh yes, you have," exclaimed Zen; "just the same reason that I have for knowing it, and that is only her face and her way this evening." After a short pause, Zen went on with apparent irrelevance. "Were you quite in earnest about what you said in the hall this afternoon, Lord Arden? Don't you believe there can be such a thing as a happy marriage? Because I want to know," she went on impetuously. "If it's an impossibility, you see, there isn't much use in bothering about being found fault with, for that is simply the thing I *can't* bear—to be found fault with."

"I suppose nobody likes it, but we all have to put up with it," replied Arden, uncertain how to take her, and still thinking of Kooràli.

"Oh, but it's different with me. All my life I have been allowed to say and do what I pleased, and nobody found fault, or, if they did," added Zen artlessly, "I didn't care. I don't mean that I've had a happy life, for I haven't. Nobody ever cared for me; but I've always done and said what I liked."

Lord Arden was touched. "My dear Mrs. Eustace——" he began. And then he saw that Zen's lips were quivering.

She pulled herself up with a sort of jerk and an uncertain laugh.

"I'm talking to you just as I began to talk to Kooràli a little while ago, and it isn't my way. I don't really mean it. Never mind! We are all in the dumps, this evening, aren't we now? There's something in the air. Look at Mr. Morse—he hasn't been like himself either. You wouldn't think, judging from his face, that he was a successful man and had made a happy marriage. If ever there ought to be a happy marriage, I suppose that's it, for Lady Betty is just perfect. Yet I can't get over the fancy, Lord Arden, that a woman who didn't belong quite altogether to the great world would have suited him better, don't you know—some one altogether more romantic—more like—yes, more like Kooràli."

Arden and Zen both glanced involuntarily towards Kooràli first, and then at Morse. They saw that Crichton had moved away, and that Morse's eyes were on Kooràli. They saw that she turned her head as if drawn by a magnetic current, and that a look was interchanged between the two. It was unconscious; it was very brief; both pairs of eyes were instantly averted, but much was revealed. The same thought flashed across the minds of Zen and Arden. She shot towards him a glance of terrified understanding. His eyes, meeting hers, had something of the same expression. Just then Eustace lounged up, and said in his well-bred drawl, "My dear Zenobia, your negro melodies are very original, and charming, no doubt; but Lady Clarence is an excellent musician, in a different style—don't you thing you might ask her to play?"

Zenobia flushed up, and with an abrupt gesture went to do her duty as hostess.

The evening wore away—to Kooràli it had seemed interminable. At last she was alone in her room. Just as they were going upstairs, she heard Morse propose a cigarette on the terrace to her husband. The sound of their voices and steps reached her now through the open window.

She had taken off her dress, and was wrapped in a loose white cashmere robe. Her hair was unbound and plaited for the night like a child's, in two long plaits that fell on her shoulders. She had occupied herself with it during some time. She paced the room restlessly for a little while, then sat down very quiet and pale in an arm-chair by the fireplace. She could not go to bed. She felt that she must wait up and hear Crichton's decision.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST APPEAL.

An hour or more passed slowly. The steps had died away, and Kooràli supposed that her husband and Morse had gone within, perhaps to carry on their conversation in more serious strain. At last there was the sound of opening and closing doors, and of "Good nights" interchanged, and then Kooràli heard the handle of her own door turned, and Crichton entered.

He had a look of suppressed excitement. He held his head erect, and his long, lean neck seemed longer and leaner, more than ever like that of one of those hungry hawks which Kooràli remembered hanging round the stock-yard fence in Australia. He shut the door behind him and waited, as if for her to speak. But though she was cold with nervous expectation, it would have been impossible for her at that moment to frame a direct question.

"You are late," she said in a mechanical way.

"I didn't expect to find you waiting up for me," he returned in that sarcastic tone which always chilled Kooràli's utterances. "Why is this? You don't often favour me with an opportunity for a conjugal *tête-à-tête*. You are generally tired, or you have a headache, when I want to talk over things with you."

There was a little pause.

"Have you not something you want to talk over with me to-night?" she asked.

"No," he answered, coming opposite to her, and eyeing her with a curious expression on his face; "I've said all that was necessary already—to Morse."

There was another silence. Kooràli got up from her chair, and moved towards him a step or two. Then she stopped short, and looked at him with anxious eyes.

"Crichton," she said.

"Well?"

"You know what I want to speak about?"

"Perhaps I do, perhaps I don't," he said, giving a harsh little laugh. "You remember the man in Moliére, Kooràli? The doctor asks him if he knows Latin, and he answers 'Of course I do, but speak to me as if I didn't.'"

He crossed to the fireplace, and stood with his back against the high mantel-piece and his eyes on the ground.

"About Mr. Morse," Kooràli went on in a firm voice as cold as his own. "He has spoken to me. He wants you to accept a permanent appointment—he can get it for you, out of England—in one of the colonies."

Kenway looked up and stared fiercely at her for a moment or two before he spoke a word. "Does he take me for a fool?" he said at

last. "Do you take me for a fool, Kooràli? Do you think I haven't had enough of the colonies in my time? Do you think I'm going to bury myself in some trumpery colonial place, away from London and from everything that makes life worth living to a man of sense—to bury myself out there—with you? Not I, my dear. And so I gave your friend Morse to understand. And so you may tell him, too. I prefer to take my chance with the other men who are waiting for him to come into power. Get him to try again, Kooràli. I dare say you can prevail upon him to mend his hand."

At another time Kooràli would have resented the insinuation which lay only half-hidden under his tone and words. Now she took it patiently. Did she not deserve it? No thought of wrong had ever come into her mind. No feeling unworthy of a woman had ever for a moment made her heart sound to a false note; and yet the consciousness of a secret forbade her now to be angry at her husband's taunting words. A woman less resolute than Kooràli to do right would not, perhaps, have been so keenly sensitive.

She moved a little and rested her hand on the back of a couch near which she stood. "Crichton," she said, very gently and soothingly, "you will let me advise you about this before you make up your mind, won't you? Don't let us speak bitterly to one another. I will try to please you all I can. We will be good friends. Our interests are the same, and we have our children—they ought to make us tender to each other. You will try to love me, and I will try to love you. I will, indeed; we are bound together in life or death, we two——"

Crichton interrupted her with an impatient gesture. "That's all very true, and very nice, and very pretty, Kooràli; but I don't quite see what it has to do with the question of a colonial appointment. Come to the point, my dear, and don't be too sentimental, please."

"I would rather you took Mr. Morse's offer, Crichton."

"Truly, but I would rather not, dear; and that makes all the difference, don't you see?"

"But if I were to ask you, Crichton? If I were to say that I felt sure it would be better for you and better for me?" Kooràli stooped forward and bent her pleading face towards him, but he kept his turned from her. "We are not fit for this sort of London life—I am not, at least; and—oh, Crichton, it is right that you should consider me a little."

"You are always giving me to understand that I consider you a very little," he replied; and he smiled complacently at his own humour.

"Oh, I do want to leave this place," Kooràli exclaimed passionately. "I want to be out of it, away from it for ever. Crichton, do listen to me! I want to begin a new life in some other place. I want to forget our quarrels and want of sympathy, and to start afresh. I do indeed. I believe that you and I can yet be happy together. At least, we can try. Let us try to be a good and loving husband and wife, and live

for each other and for our children, and love them and love each other in them. That is all my ambition now—all, all my ambition. And I will do all I can; I will be a good, true wife to you, and we will begin this new life, shall we not, together?"

She spoke in little broken sentences, nervously pressing her hands upon each other. Crichton looked at her now with something of a more serious inquiry in his eyes, which he again averted."

"I don't understand all this, Kooràli. I don't complain of you. I don't see what you have to complain of. Many a woman would be glad enough to stand in your shoes. As for there being a want of sympathy between us, I suppose we agree in looking after our interests; what more do you want? In the name of common sense, do you expect me to pay you compliments and attention as if I weren't your husband? There are plenty of other men to do that for you. You like to be sentimental, and to imagine that you are neglected and unhappy."

"In good truth, Crichton," she answered, with a plaintive smile, "I am often very lonely and very unhappy, and I think that you too must often feel we are not all to each other that we might be."

"I never said so," he replied, in a less rasping tone. "I never said that you didn't make a good wife to me. The fact is, I suppose, that you *are* too good—in all that sort of way—for a man like me. I dare say that I should have got on better with a woman of coarser fibre. I think I get annoyed sometimes by the thought that you are of too fine a grit for me, and that you know it. And then you exceedingly good little women have an irritating way of looking down on us poor sinful men of the world. Well, anyhow, I don't find fault with you, Kooràli, and I think we rub along quite well enough, as married people go, and so there is no necessity to seek out some summer isle of Eden to begin a new existence in. That isn't my form, dear; I prefer London life. Here I am, and here I mean to stay."

"Have you no thought for me?" she pleaded. "Have you never thought that it may not be good for me—this kind of life, the life we lead in London?"

"What do you mean by 'not good for you'? Late hours and that? My dear, you can stay at home if you like. Of course, it would please me better that you should go out and be seen everywhere, but never mind about that. Whether I am pleased or not, it is of no particular consequence, I suppose."

"Crichton, you *will* not understand me. I must speak plainly. I wouldn't if I could help it. Do you think that a woman has no feelings and no weakness? You want me to go into society, to make friends for you who will be useful. You want me to be admired. Have you never thought that I might—that I might come to like admiration too much?"

"No," he answered coolly; "and I don't see what it would matter if you did. I suppose you could have enough if you tried for it."

"Oh!" she cried in something like a burst of despair, "can't you

understand that I might get to think too much of one man's admiration—and of him?"

She looked at her husband straight, with an eager questioning gaze, as if she longed, yet feared, to read his soul. He did not at once answer, and he seemed determined not to meet her eyes.

"Nothing would come of that—I know," he said at last with icy deliberation.

"No, except suffering to me; and you don't care about that—you don't care about that, I know. But I was not thinking about myself only, Crichton," she went on in a tone of forced quietness, "I was thinking about you. This life does not suit you. It never could. You would grow worse and worse in it. I mean that you could never be rich enough for the people you care to live among; and you would try and strain to keep up with them and be like them, and it would be all a miserable mistake, with ruin at the end. See how we have been going to ruin here—in this short time. What appointment could you get in England which would give you half, or quarter, the money you want to spend? Oh, I have thought it all out; and I could bear my own troubles, whatever they might be." She stiffened herself up with a feeling of womanly pride. "And nothing, as you say, would come of that. But I see only ruin for you and disgrace for our children in the life we are sure to lead. I see us drifting farther and farther apart, till I tremble to think of what may come of it. I can answer for myself, but you cannot answer for yourself, and you know it. My husband, forgive me. I want to take care of you, and I want you, Heaven knows, to take care of me."

Crichton made a few impatient steps, and came back to his former position.

"Look here, Koorâli," he said, "I think we have had about enough of this. You need not trouble about me. I would much rather be ruined, as you call it, in London, than lead a stupid humdrum existence on a small salary as the governor of some pitiful hole of a colony. I don't care about fine climate; I have had fine climate enough already. Pall Mall and Piccadilly are good enough for me. I want to be at the centre of things. I want to live in the world, and I mean to do it too; so that's settled. As for you—well, my mind is quite at ease about *you*. I know the sort of woman you are. You're cold enough and proud enough to be able to help me without doing any harm to yourself. Come, I don't mean anything tragic." For she had started, and her eyes flashed on him. "Why will you always take things and me from the point of view of the virtuous heroine of the Surrey Theatre? It's stupid. It's provincial. It isn't life—at any rate, it isn't my idea of life, and I think I'm a fair sample of the man of the world. We have got to live in the world, and to deal with worldly men and women; not with a set of saints and prigs, or melodramatic demons either."

"I want to understand you," she said very quietly. "Your way of looking at things is not my way. I want to follow you if I can—I

mean in what you say about my being able to help you. Tell me what it is you wish me to do. Tell me in plain words."

"Sit down, then," said Kenway. "You look so deucedly uncomfortable and superior standing up there. It's very simple. I only want you to make my interests yours — and, by Jove, you can't separate them—and to enjoy life." He threw himself into an arm-chair as he spoke, and Kooràli, obeying him, sat down upon the sofa by which she had been standing. She waited for him to speak.

"You are a very pretty woman," said Kenway at last, "and a very clever one, in your way; a very good woman too. I have the fullest trust in you. I have a higher opinion of you than you seem to have of yourself, Kooràli."

Her lips tightened a little; she did not answer.

"The world is our oyster," continued Kenway, "and we have got to open it—you and I. It should not be a hard task. I flatter myself that I am something more than merely beauty's husband. Morse has obligingly told me this evening that I have claims and capabilities. A great deal depends on you. You are quite right. We are husband and wife—bound to each other—and we must stand or fall together. I only ask from you what any clever man has a right to expect from a clever wife."

Kenway waited again for a moment; but Kooràli was still silent.

"You did not make the use which you might have made of your opportunities this season," he said. "By an extraordinary piece of luck we managed to get into the thick of the political set. With a little tact, and by driving the nail home at the right moment, you might have made enormous interest in different quarters. As it is, you forced me to put all my eggs into one basket."

"I don't know what you mean," she said slowly. "How forced you?"

"Come, hang it, Kooràli! You know that Morse's attentions to you were pretty well talked over at the clubs and in the drawing-rooms. Do you suppose that people didn't remark how often he came to see you, how he singled you out at places, and the keen interest you took in his political views? I'm not hinting anything derogatory to you or him, or to myself. I fancy that I know how to take care of my wife; but the other men who might have pushed me forward dropped away. It was your fault."

"Crichton," said Kooràli passionately, "you know very well why that was. Oh, I have learned a great deal during these months. I could not endure some of those men. I don't know how you could endure them."

"You choked off Coulmont, who will be a power if the war party carries the day. He is a man who never forgets or forgives being made to feel small, and you made him feel small. It was stupid, dear. As long as I didn't mind a little silly sentiment, you might safely have amused yourself with it. Another woman would have managed the situation, and would have kept his friendship."

"I believed that I had kept his friendship—or, at least, his respect."

"Oh, that's rot!" said Kenway with his incisive drawl. "It doesn't go down with a man like Coulmont. I can see through his offer of this appointment. What I can't see through is why Morse wants me to accept it—unless Lady Betty is at the bottom of the whole thing."

Kooràli's chest heaved. She was suffering as only a proud woman can suffer.

"No; I don't understand it," Kenway went on reflectively. "A man doesn't generally do his best to put a woman whose society pleases him out of reach—not such a man as Morse—Coulmont is quite another sort. Of course you did the right thing from the 'lofty morality' point of view, in turning the cold shoulder on him; but women of the world *have* ways of gliding over the quicksands without loss of dignity. You managed badly, dear. You should try a little *finesse*. It's an accomplishment, however, not to be learned in South Britain. Well, never mind, you lost Coulmont, and you lost Inglish and Barry; and next season you will be a little out of date, and the crisis will be over. If Morse hasn't come in, my chance will have slipped by."

"Mr. Morse may not come into power," said Kooràli, still in that quiet, repressed way. "He has told me that it is likely he will not take the chance even if it is offered him. Wouldn't it be better, Crichton, seeing that I have, as you say, mismanaged opportunities, to secure this one?"

"Morse will go in," said Crichton. "I don't believe in the conscientious scruple which holds a man back from being Prime Minister of England. Hasn't he been working up to this for years? His party wouldn't let him draw back. By God, if he does——" Kenway got up excitedly from his seat. He made a few hurried paces, then stopped at the mantel-piece in his old attitude. "Listen, Kooràli," he said. "Morse will be in power, and he will get me a good appointment if *you* play your cards properly. I'm not blind. I'm not a fool. Drop the part of stage heroine, and be a woman of the world. You like Morse's society. He likes yours. You like the London life, though you've imagined yourself into an hysterical dread of unreal evils—the glittering throng, the modern Babylon, and so on. If you want us to get on happily together, and to be a united husband and wife—if you want to further your boys' interests, this is how you can do it. Keep good friends with Lady Betty, and be Morse's political Egeria—if you both like it. Why should he want to pack you off to a distant colony? Why should you wish to go?"

Kooràli rose, almost blindly. "Because—because—— Oh, Crichton, have you no mercy?" She stretched out her arms helplessly. It was indeed as if she were clutching at some spar out of the sea, and the hand which ought to have helped her to safety had only seized her wrist to detach it from its hold and fling her out again upon the dark tossing waters. Her voice broke in a passionate sob; but she commanded it after a moment. "I will *never* ask Mr. Morse to give you

an appointment in England," she cried. "Let us get deeper and deeper into debt—let us starve first. This is our last word on *this* subject. I thought, Crichton, that if you had ever loved me, you would help me, and be gentle and good to me, not cold and sneering and cruel, when I came to you like this, when I asked you for my sake, when I wanted so to begin afresh, and to be a good and true wife to you. But it can't be. It's no use. You don't love me. You can, never have loved me—and I—Heaven help me!—I can't love you. Crichton, and I can't respect you. And so we must go our ways, and it may be ruin and misery; or, it may be, that you will get what you want now, and the worst ruin and misery will come later. I don't think there can be any worse ruin, Crichton, or any worse misery than such a marriage as ours."

She passed him swiftly, and almost before he could realize that she was leaving the room, had closed behind her a heavy oak door at one side of the fireplace. It led into a tiny boudoir—one of the curious nooks in that part of the house which Zen had fitted up. Kooràli shot the bolt; and then she flung herself upon a cushioned settee beneath the high mullioned window, and all her passion and her difficult effort spent itself in a storm of sobs.

Kenway made several attempts to open the door; but it did not yield. He called her—at first angrily, then soothingly—but she made no answer; indeed, she hardly heard his voice. By-and-by he desisted, and all was silent. There was no light in the room, except the uncertain glimmer from without. All the rest of the night Kooràli sat there. After the first burst of sobbing, she cried no more. Her heart seemed frozen. The pale grey dawn crept in through the window and found her still sitting there all cold and white and lonely.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"THOU SHALT RENOUNCE."

But in those grey hours, brain, heart, and soul were working; and the Kooràli who watched the dawn creep in and the sun rise on that morning—a turning-point indeed in her life—was not the Kooràli of yesterday—the struggling, bewildered creature, feeble and uncertain, not daring to trust in her own strength, but beating helplessly this way and that, and in her despair clutching at a reed for support.

The reed had pierced her hand. As she sat there, with her head pressed back against the stone frame of the window, and her arms clasping her knees in that childlike attitude of hers, it came more and more in upon her that she had known from the very first how it would be, and yet had never told herself. She seemed to have read her husband's character from their marriage day, and yet to have struggled on, wilfully blinding herself. She felt a great scorn and a great pity over the futile efforts she so well remembered having made. She had

tried so hard to believe that he was not base, that his selfishness, his bad temper and constant reach for the lowest motives, were only faults on the surface and not rooted in his nature. Her very acceptance of him as he was, her dulness and indifference had been a sort of self-deception, evident to her had she allowed herself to analyze. But she had been living too keenly during the past months for indifference to be any longer possible. She knew her husband as he was—as he had always been—cold-hearted, mean, cruel; one who would sell his wife—in the spirit, if not in the letter; trade upon her "temperament;" traffic with her smiles; train her to be as cold and selfish and base as himself.

"It is wrong. It cannot be;" a voice within her spoke passionately. "God never joined two souls for baseness. I am not his wife. He is not my husband. I despise him—I shrink from him. I—oh, God help me!—I hate him. What right has he over me—or over my children, to make them as bad as he is?"

She did not feel weak now, or uncertain. An icy self-reliance sustained her. She thought the matter out. Her very forlornness and her desperation gave her strength and courage to face the position—to face it with a strange mingling of romantic exaltation and worldly wisdom. She knew the part she must play; the life she must at least appear to lead. She and Crichton were divided in mind and feeling as completely as though they were strangers. Had themselves alone been in question, her reason and her instinct of right would have declared that they had better live apart, and she would have gone—whither she cared not, so that she were away from him and alone. But her children were chains which held her fast; would hold her for ever. Her sense of duty to them must override her wild longing for freedom, her sense of duty to herself. She must remain by her husband's side, by the side of the father of her children. She must show a semblance of union to the world, must shut eyes, ears, heart, and live blind, deaf, and starved of love, for her children's sake. But she would lend herself to no ignoble schemes. Her children should be taught to honour disinterestedness. Ruin might come—and, in truth, might it not be best; for, when Crichton found her a burden, might he not give her liberty and the children? She would not steal her liberty; but oh, how gladly would she take it if Crichton released her, and allowed her and her boys to go!

This was the part she laid down for herself. There should be no more effort to reconcile antagonistic natures, no more beating against the bars. She must accept her lot, and bear it as nobly as she might. Better loneliness, desolation, than a perpetual pressing forward against knife-thrusts. One possession, at least, she owned, which dignified her for ever. To have it fuller or richer would be to dishonour it. She was glad that Morse had never spoken one word of love to her—that she could look into Lady Betty's eyes and know herself no traitress. Her king, her knight, her blameless hero! Thank God that there were men like him, to make women believe in truth and goodness!

She had almost let her faith slip. Was not that the worst sorrow? If all men in the world were like Crichton, what poverty in Heaven! The woman's heart bled. As it bled there came an involuntary murmur, woman-like, wilful. "Might he not have kissed me just once?" But it was silenced in an instant; and she put the thought from her as something evil, as of something outside herself working for evil. Yet it was only a thought, sweet and tender and poetic. Her lips had never in her life been touched by those of any lover, save, indeed, her husband; and she had been proud that this was so, with a kind of hard, melancholy pride. Now she knew that something had been wanting to her always, and must always be wanting. She felt like the childless mother, whose little one has never seen the light.

In good truth, Kooráli was thirsting for some expression of the love which every woman feels should be hers by right of nature. There was a painful stab in the knowledge that she could have loved, and loved well. Oh yes, yes; Kooràli knew that she, who seemed so cold and niggardly, could warm under the right influence, and give a love beyond the gift of most women and worthy of the beloved one. She knew herself to have been warped, stunted by her marriage. There was bitterness and wrong here. All the petty bickering and clashings, the resentful withdrawing into herself, the constant and bewildering readjustment of her standard—all this had been so much injury to what God had created. She dared not think of herself as she might have been, fitly mated. It was like a tantalizing glimpse of an impossible heaven on earth. Could any heaven accordant with tradition give her the sunshine under which her nature might blossom to perfection? A right to one, a wrong to another equally deserving; the whole scheme an impossible puzzle. Then why these cruel glimmerings of an ideal?

Kooràli might well have lost anchorage. Like many women of delicate fibre, however, she had at times of crisis a curious strength of resolution and power of fighting her way straight through opposing forces. Nervously impressionable as she was, her spirit rose and she felt a certain excitement in the prospect of a battle, whether hidden or in the open. Her battle now could not be in the open. What she had to do was very clear. She was Crichton's wife—his servant, she reflected bitterly, without a servant's privileges. Unless he gave her her freedom, she must for her children's sake remain subject to him. He chose to expose her to danger, and she must defend herself. She had made her appeal to him for protection, and it had been fruitless. It was not temptation she dreaded—there she was safe—but suffering. Well, she must wrap herself round, and silently bear her pain. As Morse had said, a great misfortune had come to him and her, and there was nothing but to bear it—to go on with her life and give no sign. Under altered conditions endurance becomes easier. This was the worst kind. She must live in conventional intercourse with her husband—in conventional intercourse with the man she loved. Her

hope lay in clinging to the conventional. Morse, she was certain, would understand her. With Crichton she would simply stand armed on the defensive, ignoring as far as she could the real knowledge of him, and hiding her feelings under a mask of courtesy. She would try to be always courteous to him, to comply with his ordinary wishes, to talk to him on the outside of things, to yield where no principle was involved. She would never again attempt to reason, or argue, or appeal. She hoped that he would be content with such seeming. Since she had satisfied herself that he did not care for her, she thought this possible. Her imagination travelled too swiftly to take count of all the difficulties, and she did not foresee the galling of such yoke-fellowship.

The old friendly companionship with Morse, she decided, must not be resumed. In the presence of Lady Betty and of others she must seem what she had always been, and continue still to show the old interest in Morse's career; but below the surface all would be different. She must avoid being alone with him, and he would help her in this. There would be no more droppings-in on his way to the House of Commons for a quiet confidential chat, no more saunterings on the terrace, no more of the vaguely tender, wholly intimate notes dashed off in the upstairs lobby during the intervals of debate to tell her how things were going on—all this must come to an end.

So it was that the morning, though it found her pale and wasted by the torturing thoughts and sleepless night, found her also composed, and with the almost stupefying sense of a new existence begun. She was spared the meeting with her husband for two or three hours yet. She heard him called when the first signs of movement began in the house, and remembered that some of the party were going out cub-hunting that morning, he among them. Presently the horses came round and were led up and down the gravel sweep. Oh yes, the world went on, and people got up at six o'clock for cub-hunting, and scolded their grooms and swore over the ties of their gaiters, no matter whether hearts were breaking within a few feet of them.

Zen's robust voice sounded at Crichton's door, inquiring if he were ready, and he replied in his most genial tones with a compliment upon her punctuality. Crichton cultivated what Lord Beaconsfield once called "a violent good humour" in his manner to Zen.

When they had gone Koorâli came out of her retreat. She was stiff and chilled, and she shrank back at the sight of her own image in the cheval-glass—it looked so like a ghost. She crept into bed, and slept like a tired child.

She rose late. Crichton came into her room, still in his hunting clothes, when she was almost dressed. He looked at her nervously as he entered. There was some fear in his mind lest he had gone too far—had put things too plainly, and roused her indignation or hurt her feelings. There was so much "twaddle and rot," as he phrased it, in women of the higher type. Of course it was the right theory that one's wife should belong to the higher type, but the lower one was

infinitely pleasanter to deal with. However, he reflected, women's feelings are more readily amenable to marital treatment, and it must be a very unreasonable wife who, after ten years' experience, looks for sentiment and fine speeches from her husband. Koorâli had been out of sorts the night before. Probably, if the truth could be known, she had herself felt dissatisfied with the progress of her flirtation with Morse. Kenway was an old hand at it, and she evidently wasn't quite up to all the tactics of the game, and had a little overdone the part of right propriety. She had resented his apparent wish to remove her from London, and her resentment had found vent in the little outburst. Crichton knew what that sort of thing meant, and how long it lasted. Koorâli could take a very practical view of matters when she liked. She had probably come to that view by this time, and had determined to handle Morse more artfully. The darting thought shot through him—was the whole thing a put-up job, after the Lord Steyne and Becky Sharp pattern, to get him, Crichton, out of the way? By the Lord, if that were so, he'd soon show them that he wasn't a man to stand that sort of thing! But the sight of his wife's pale pure face, as she sat under her maid's hands before the glass, forced the suggestion from his mind. No: Koorâli wasn't deep enough for that. She had only had a slight access of hysterical virtue—had been a little frightened perhaps, had not given him credit for intending to take care of her. Of course he would keep things from going too far: he could not let her be placed in a false position. In the meantime she must be taught to play her cards like a woman of the world—to play into his hands. It was quite time that she should see there need be no affectation between them. Doubtless she was beginning to see this already.

The composed way in which she looked up as he approached confirmed this theory. Her face was like that of a statue—but it smiled. Evidently she meant him to understand that there was no ill-feeling on her part. He began to admire her as a woman of sense, and to feel more comfortable.

"Good morning, Crichton," she said quietly. "I hope that you enjoyed your run."

"One doesn't expect much of a run at this time of the year," returned Crichton, with an easy laugh. "We had a little spin after a game cub. Old Pobito was none the worse for his potations last night, and a good many of the fellows sneered: and it was a little hard on Eva the way they seemed to think *I* ought to be at the Priory. By Jove, if *I* were Eustace, I'd go in for something better than French novels." Crichton came up closer to Koorâli, and put his hand upon her shoulder. The maid had left the room. "I hope that you are pretty well, dear?" There was an ill-concealed touch of anxiety in his tone. Now was the moment for fuss, if she meant to make any.

"Yes, thank you," Koorâli replied, rising as she spoke, so that he was obliged to take his hand away. "I will go downstairs now. Do you know where everybody is to be found?"

"Oh, about the tennis-ground, I fancy. I said that I'd play a match with Jo Garling as soon as I had got into my harness." Crichton's air was now quite self-assured. Clearly, Kooràli was going to be reasonable. The courses of the night had brought her wisdom. "By the way, Kooràli," he began, and paused for an instant while she steadily took up a ring from a stand on the toilette table, and put it on her finger, "Morse has had a telegram or something from Lady Betty, and starts off at once to meet her in London. He was asking after you."

"I will go down," said Kooràli mechanically. She put on her rings one by one.

"I don't think you need say anything to him about that question of the appointment," said Crichton in an off-hand way.

"No," she answered.

"Better let the whole thing stand over till after the elections; and then see what my luck turns up. I'm a great believer in my luck. It has carried me over a nasty place more than once—eh, old girl?"

Kooràli was silent; but he repeated his question and forced her to answer him. She turned to him with that hard bright look in her eyes which puzzled while it reassured him.

"You know the saying, Crichton—about riding luck to the devil—isn't it? I don't myself believe in trusting to one's luck, perhaps—because my luck has never helped me in a trouble." She moved to the door. "I'll tell Jo, shall I, that you will be down presently?" she said, and left him.

Crichton hummed an air softly to himself as he changed his clothes. His gallop that morning had done him good. He meant to have some capital days' hunting that season. His short experience of the country had already shown him that he might be very popular in the field. "What a confounded ass Eustace is," he murmured; "and what a confounded ass I was not to wait till I got home, and marry a woman with money." On the whole, however, he did not look so darkly upon life. He felt inwardly convinced that Morse would never throw up his chances, and that Morse could and would, if Kooràli chose, give him something good in London. He did not intend to be Governor of Farnesia, unless the worst came to the very worst, and if it did, and Farnesia could not keep, something else would turn up—something else, or, as he melodramatically put it, revenge. He was not going to be played fast and loose with and not strike a blow on his own account. Underlying his outward friendship with Morse there was a deep jealous resentment. He hated Morse for being stronger, better, and more prosperous than himself. He hated Morse, who he taught himself to believe had started only a little ahead of him in the race, for having gained the goal so quickly; for having been successful in Australia, and still more successful in England; for having married such a wife as Lady Betty, highly born and rich. In a strange inconsistent way he resented while he encouraged Morse's admiration of Kooràli. He felt angry and secretly humiliated because Morse had

found that in Kooràli which he had never found, had touched a spring in her nature that he had never reached. There was something warped, morbid, and unnatural in his feelings towards Morse. He meant to make use of Morse's power if he could. Failing that, he would joyfully have lent a hand to hurl Morse from his position, and bring discredit upon him.

There was a slight autumnal chill about the air which at another time Kooràli might have found pleasant and reviving. Now, however, it seemed to strike cold to her heart. It was only too much in accord with the chill which everything else brought with it to her. She went out in front of the house. A little group of men and women was there, and Kooràli saw Morse among them. They were laughing and talking gaily. She went towards them. When Morse saw her coming he went out to meet her. So did Lord Arden.

They talked the fine weather a little; and Morse spoke of his having to go up to town and his regret at leaving so pleasant a gathering. It was the regular conventional sort of talk. Arden struck in, and some pleasant things were said, and Kooràli was as bright as she could contrive to be; and no one merely looking on would have suspected that any soul's tragedy was being enacted there all the time. Some one else added himself or herself to the group and others dispersed, and it was about the time when Morse ought to be saying good-bye to his hostess and his friends.

It had grown to be quite a common thing for Morse and Kooràli to walk together and talk, and so it happened that the others of the company gradually dropped away. Miss Jo and Mr. Erle were flirting demurely over the tennis-net. Now Crichton came out, and a set was being formed. Morse and Kooràli were left alone. They began to pace up and down in the old way. Kooràli held her breath. She knew he would do the right thing; yet the moment was critical, and she felt profoundly anxious. They were near the rose garden and that flight of steps where he had gathered the roses for her on *that* day. The broad walk below, with its myrtles and magnolias blooming in the embrasures of the wall, and its tangled border of late flowers, seemed to invite them for a last brief interchange of confidence. Kooràli sometimes thought herself pitifully weak, womanish. Her heart beat with longing and dread. But the strength of the man showed now. At first he seemed about to go down the steps that led to the lower terrace; but he suddenly checked himself and a shade came over his face. Well, she need fear no longer. She knew what was passing in his mind. No; they must not go there—ever again. Her heart was as an echo of his. Then Morse spoke—

"It is rather a nuisance to have to go back to town at this season, Mrs. Kenway," he said, "when everybody is away."

Yes; she understood. It was exactly what she would have had; exactly what she might have expected from his tact, his feeling, his strong steady manhood. Henceforth, when they chanced to be thrown together and alone—if they ever were again to be alone—they were to

be strictly formal and conventional. They were to be—like any other two. If the unspoken words of the lower terrace were not to be forgotten—if they could not be forgotten—yet they must be remembered only as unspoken; as never to be spoken. Thus, and not otherwise, could all be redeemed and the past pass without leaving taste of bitterness or tinge of shame behind it. She felt grateful to him; grateful once more. But, of course, she knew it would be so; she knew that he would feel as she felt. She answered in a quiet, steady voice—

"But you would have to leave this place very soon, in any case, for the election campaign, would you not?"

"Oh yes; I shall have two constituencies on my hands, you know. I think I shall be beaten in one; but the other is my old place, and I am pretty safe there. I am going to town to meet my wife. She is only passing through; coming from Homburg, and going on to some place in the country. I don't quite know all her plans as yet."

"I hope you will be successful in your more difficult contest," Kooràli said.

"Thank you, Mrs. Kenway; you are very kind. Except for the political advantage of making the fight and carrying the seat, if I can, I would rather stick to my own old constituency. But we must make the fight."

"Then I hope you will win."

"Thanks, very much. I shall do my best."

Then it was announced that the phaeton was ready to take Morse to the station. One or two of the other guests were going somewhere by the train as well.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Kenway," Morse said, raising his hat.

"Good-bye, Mr. Morse. I hope you will have a pleasant journey to London, and that you will find Lady Betty quite well." And then, after a second's pause, Kooràli bravely added, "My—love—to Lady Betty, please."

"Certainly; she is sure to ask me about you. Good-bye."

They shook hands in the conventional way. No faintest pressure told of feelings existing but kept down. The new rule of life had become an unwritten law for both of them. Kooràli looked along the path for a moment as Morse went his way, and many strange thoughts and memories passed in confusion across her mind. All was over now but the dying. The struggle was at an end. The curtain of tragedy had fallen; the farce of the formal and the conventional had yet to be played. The life of cold restriction and mere self-denial had begun. Such, she felt, was the only life left for her to live any more.

She saw him cross the lawn to say good-bye to Zen and the tennis-players. She heard the laughter and the parting wishes that he might have a successful electoral campaign. She saw her husband throw down his racket and go with Morse to the phaeton, and she saw him bend towards Morse while he talked in an eager, confidential manner, with his watchful eyes upon Morse's face, which was cast down and

moody. She could almost fancy she heard Crichton's good wishes uttered in that frank tone that covered so much.

The phaeton drove away. It was all over, and death was in her heart. She had never realized the meaning of the phrase till now—the death of love which had not been allowed to live. She went back to the rose garden and stood among the blossoms and the buds, so many of which would be nipped before they came to bloom. Some one had been watching her with sympathy in his eyes. It was Lord Arden. He longed to show her that she had a friend who understood her and felt for her, but he could hardly venture to thrust himself upon her then.

There was a call from the tennis-players for Mrs. Crichton Kenway, and Zen was running forward, but Arden interposed.

"No, no, Mrs. Eustace. Let me find your sister-in-law for you. But I feel perfectly certain she won't join in." He went towards Kooràli. "Mrs. Kenway, they want you to play tennis; and you don't want to, I am sure."

"Oh no." Kooràli started at his voice, and looked at him as if she were awakening from a dream.

He saw that her eyes were bright with unshed tears. "Then let us take a little turn instead."

They strolled away past the rose garden and beyond the big clump of yews to a walk in the shrubbery. She shrank from the lower terrace towards which he made a movement, and he noticed this and remembered—he hardly knew why—that she had been walking there with Morse yesterday.

The path they had chosen led down to the river. They talked on indifferent subjects for a little while. Kooràli's remarks were constrained and absent. Suddenly Arden said, on an impulse of the moment—

"Mrs. Kenway, I'm sure you haven't been quite well lately, or you are a little worried about something. Don't think me impertinent—and I don't suppose I ever could do anything really in the way of advising or helping you; but I do want you to know that if I could, and you'd let me, it would be just the greatest happiness I could have."

A bright flush rose to Kooràli's pale cheeks. She turned her eyes to his with an almost childlike expression of mingled gratitude and embarrassment. She was too truthful to deny that there was anything amiss with her, though she winced under the suggestion; and she liked Lord Arden too sincerely to resent his solicitude.

"No, there's no way in which you can help me, Lord Arden; but thank you all the same. It is kind of you to think about me."

"At any rate," he said more earnestly, "you know that I mean it; and I think there might come to be a way some time or other. Somehow there generally does come to be a way, I think, in which a true friend can give one help. You'll let me call myself your true friend, Mrs. Kenway?"

"Oh yes, indeed; I am glad," she answered warmly.

"It's what I am—nothing more nor less—whether you will have it or not. And so, now you know—as the children say," he added, with a little laugh which concealed some emotion.

"I know that you are very good," she said, and her voice trembled. "There's no one I'd rather trust than you, and I am proud to have you for my friend. But you're a little mistaken—I mean in thinking that I need help or advice—or—anything now. My way is quite straight. I've only got to walk in it."

"Promise me, anyhow, that if you ever do want them you'll give me a chance," he pleaded with almost boyish eagerness. "You may safely make the promise, Mrs. Kenway, since you are so certain the need won't arise."

She thought a moment or two, with her look bent on the ground. Then she raised her dark truthful eyes to his face. She saw great kindness, true interest, and perfect sincerity written there.

"I never had a sister," he said, "and you are just the woman I'd like to have for my sister. Come, won't you give me the promise?"

"Yes, I will," she said simply; "and thank you, Lord Arden."

There was a little silence. He was more moved than he cared to show. They turned homeward. Presently he said—

"You never met my father, did you, Mrs. Kenway?"

"Lord Forrest? No. But he never goes out, does he?"

"Almost never. He is an invalid, and belongs to the past somehow. He lives among books and pictures and bric-à-brac; and the house is dreary and seems to want a woman about it. He has a chivalrous sort of liking for just a few women—Lady Betty Morse is one of them—and they go to see him now and then; he very rarely goes to any of them. I think you'd like him, Mrs. Kenway; and I know he'd be deeply interested in you, and that you would be doing a kindness if you'd let me take you to see him some time when we are all in London again."

"I will, most gladly," said Koorâli. "I have heard of your father; and I have made a picture of him in my imagination, and it will be a great pleasure to me to know him."

Arden knew that her sweet poetic face, her sympathetic intelligence, and shy, graceful manner, with the suggestion it gave of something un-English, would delight Lord Forrest; and he had an instinctive feeling that the friendship of the cultivated, exclusive, and chivalrous old Jacobite nobleman might be of advantage to her in the somewhat difficult part she had to play in London society.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"PURSUING A PHANTOM."

Morse went that evening to meet his wife at the Charing Cross station. The compartment she occupied was in the lower end of the train, and it was she who came first towards him, instead of him finding her. As she walked along the platform, the light of the electric lamps full upon her slender figure wrapped in a long furred cloak, and her bright small face unshaded by the little travelling cap she wore, a strange, sudden feeling, not unfamiliar, rushed over him—a fancy that he was somehow in the presence of a ghost. He had felt this upon his first meeting with Kooràli in England. He felt it now, when looking at his wife. It was as though some association connected with the two women brought before him the shade of his once-cherished ideal. Which was the ghost?—which the reality? Had he found his ideal in Lady Betty? or had it shone upon him but once long ago in the soft brightness of an Australian dawn?

Lady Betty was looking well, notwithstanding her long journey. She had a faint colour, and her eyes sparkled. She was glad to see her husband, and showed it in her pretty, half-emotional way. Morse had sometimes found himself wondering a little bitterly whether, under any conceivable circumstances, Lady Betty would be capable of taking a flight beyond the circle of her own sweet superficial nature. He could not imagine her rising to such a height of passionate feeling as to be quite forgetful of what the Court might say, and to be quite insensible to the picturesque and the becoming.

Lady Betty put her arm within that of her husband in the most charmingly appropriating manner. She took him for granted, as she took for granted all the other facts in her pleasant life. It was not necessary to be effusive. "Oh, Sandham, how nice of you! I'm so tired, dear. We've had a horrid crossing. Let us get into the carriage and go off. John can find Maling and see about the luggage;" and she gave the footman standing by a gracious little nod.

When they were in the carriage driving homeward Morse kissed his wife, and she nestled to him for a moment, and said—

'How nice it is to be in smoky London again!" She asked one or two questions about home affairs and about the whereabouts of such and such of her friends, and she had a great deal to tell about Homburg gaieties and the royal wedding, about a rumoured foreign alliance and a rumoured foreign appointment, and about the nice things which certain great personages had said to her. And then she heaved a sigh and was silent.

"What makes you sigh, Betty?" asked Morse tenderly.

"Nothing, dear. I've got a lot to ask you about by-and-by—political news, and how you have been getting on with your canvass and that. I was only thinking—it's odd isn't it? that we should have

been leading such different lives—you and I, and that you should be so out of it, in all that has been interesting me.

"Well, dear," said Morse, with a smile, "if I am out of it as regards your Royalties, I think from the nature of things you'd have been still more out of your element among my working-men."

"I think I begin to hate the working-man," said Lady Betty, with a shiver; "especially since they have given him a vote. I think it is horrible for *us* to have to truckle to the lower classes, as I suppose we must do now if we want our people to get in."

They had reached home. Later, Lady Betty having exchanged her travelling dress for a tea-gown of rich coloured Oriental stuff, in which she looked very young and very pretty, and more than ever like some bright tropical bird, was sitting with Morse over the fire in her own boudoir. Almost all the other sitting-rooms were covered up with brown holland, for the house had been given over to work-people, and Lady Betty was only going to be a few days in London before setting off on a round of visits to great country houses. She was a little vexed at finding that she would have to make most of these visits alone. Morse had decided a short while before to contest a Tory stronghold in the south of England, keeping his own constituency, where he might consider himself safe, in reserve, and there were political meetings to be held, and preparations to be made for the battle. This he had been explaining to her.

"I thought you'd have got some of that done before I came back, dear," said Lady Betty, with a gesture of reproach. "I'm afraid that you've been neglecting your duties just lately. But I suppose the duke's shooting party was a temptation. Was that where my telegram found you, Sandham?"

"I did not go to the duke's party," replied Morse, speaking deliberately. "I went to Bromswold, and I have spent the last two days at the Priory-on-the-Water. That was where your telegram found me."

Lady Betty looked surprised. "The Priory-on-the-Water?" she repeated. "Oh, I know; the place that strange Mrs. Eustace Kenway insisted on scraping. Wasn't it odd for you to go there, Sandham? What was the attraction? Not Mrs. Eustace. I suppose it was the fair Kooràli?"

Lady Betty's light words made Morse wince with a faint sense of guilt; they hurt him. But his face was quite impassive as he answered quietly, "I was very glad to have the chance of meeting Mrs. Crichton Kenway. That's quite true, Betty. I looked upon myself as a sort of English godfather to her."

"Oh, my dear, all London knows how much you admired the Australian beauty. By the way, Sandham, people seem to be getting a little tired of her. She is rather stupid, don't you think? It was only her being new that made her take. It was something quite new, indeed, to see *you* in the character of a woman's admirer, Sandham. I rather liked it, do you know? It made you more like other people.

I wasn't the least wee bit jealous. I was quite proud of having brought her out; and didn't I make things nice for her, as I promised?"

"Yes, Betty," he said, rising as he spoke, and looking down upon her with deep eyes. "And I thank you, my dear, for your trust in me."

Something in his voice made Lady Betty glance up at him quickly. "Sandham," she exclaimed, "you are not looking as well as you did when I left. You seem to me to have aged."

"That's natural enough," said Morse, with an effort at lightness. "At my time of life, child, a few weeks of hard work and worry will make the difference of as many years, whose grey hairs and wrinkles are in question. I am quite well, but I shall probably look older still before the elections are over."

"Oh! the elections!" cried Lady Betty mournfully. "I detest politics now. I feel uncomfortable whenever they're mentioned. And yet I used to be so interested in them. Of course, everybody belonging to me was in Parliament or mixed up with it all, and it seemed so natural when I married that my husband should be a politician —" She stopped suddenly, and sighed.

"Go on, Betty," said Morse. "Why do you detest politics now, and why does it seem less natural that your husband should be a politician?"

Lady Betty hesitated a moment. "Yes, but a politician whom all my people and my friends think so mistaken, don't you know; whose views are entirely out of harmony with those of my own class. Oh, Sandham, I didn't want to say disagreeable things or tell you how troubled I have been,—just the first evening."

Morse stooped and put his hand for a moment on the little dark head. "There you are wrong, Betty," he said. "If there are disagreeable things to be talked over, it's much best not to shirk or burk them. Disagreeables can't matter much anyhow; and if any one has been troubling you, your husband has a right to know it at once. Speak out, dear."

But Lady Betty did not seem inclined to say at once what was in her mind. She took up a feather screen, and held it between her face and the fire, while she seemed to be looking through it, so fixed was her melancholy gaze.

"I was it was not the fashion for women to canvass," she said; "they're all doing it now. I hope you won't want me to go down with you to Claybridge when the time comes, Sandham." She turned her face up to him now, and tears were in her eyes. "I couldn't. I think it's horrid for a wife not to uphold her husband, and I admire the women who do it. But I can't go to Claybridge."

Morse laughed a little uncomfortably. "You speak, Betty, as if I were a candidate who wanted you to stand beside him on the hustings. I wonder if you would stand by me—so? I shan't put you to that test, however, child."

"Oh, Sandham!" murmured Lady Betty.

"Or to the platform test either," he went on. "You don't think

really that I could wish you to sully your delicate bloom by coaxing votes out of unwilling Tories? Oh no, Betty, my wife should be too loving and tender and poetic for that sort of thing. That is not my idea of a politician's helpmate. I don't care for canvassing women any more than for speech-making women. There used to be a proverb in my part of the country about a whistling woman and a crowing hen. No; you need not canvass for me, and if this is all that troubles you, set your mind at rest."

"It is not all, Sandham," said Lady Betty. She looked at him again, as he stood over her with the dark expression on his face. An ungenerous thought, a sort of hope, shot through her mind. Might he not be one of those who, as it is phrased, ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds? In spite of his democratic principles, his professed disinterestedness, he had married Lord Germilion's daughter, and this marriage had in a great measure opened out his career. It was quite conceivable that he should not wish his wife to be too completely identified with his political schemes. Was not she the contradiction to that horrible imputation of league with socialists and revolutionists which she had vaguely heard cast against him? A moment later she was ashamed of having harboured for an instant the passing thought. Morse had seated himself beside her, and his face was dark no longer.

"Come, tell me, Betty, what is the matter?" he asked tenderly and with genuine anxiety. He looked into her eyes, which were wistful and sad, and he felt very affectionate to her, and not a little penitent. His thoughts reverted to the trust she expressed in him a few moments ago. If faith were rooted there, what matter all other unfaith? He was fond of her—very fond; and if the idea had been pressing harshly upon him of late that she was not quite so much the companion of his heart and of his thoughts as his wife ought to be, he could not but own to himself that there was a certain lack of loyalty in the admission, even in the very perception, of such a reality.

Lady Betty seemed to become more herself again. She turned to him with a half-questioning, half-deprecating air.

"Sandham, my dear, I have been hearing such things! I do wish you would tell me they are not true, and let me say so to my father and every one."

"What are these dreadful things, Betty?"

"You are not anti-English, Sandham? You don't want England humbled before foreign states, enemies, and all that? You don't hate the Court and the princes and princesses? You are not a republican; not one of those horrible communists? Not really, Sandham—I mean really?"

"Who has been saying all this?" Morse's brow darkened again. He was wounded by the idea of his wife coming to him with her head full of things that had been said against him—in her own presence it would seem.

Lady Betty furled and unfurled her screen. "Well, they were not

all told to me—not directly. There were a lot of the political set at Homburg; and of course I read the papers, and your speeches, and what is thought of them. And peopled talked. It was half chaff. But papa hears of things seriously, don't you know; and he has been telling me what his friends say. He was very much troubled, but I told him I was sure there was not a word of truth in the whole of it. And then he says that you are a republican, and that you don't want England to fight."

"Well, Betty," Morse said, with a melancholy sort of smile, "I don't know that I can quite authorize you to contradict your father. I am a republican on principle, or in theory, if you like; and I don't want England to go to war just now and in such a cause. Is that all?"

"But you are not a peace-at-any-price man? Dear Sandham, you are *not* that? Why, think of all one's relatives and friends in the army and the navy; and the princes, soldiers and sailors. You couldn't be that. Papa says no gentleman could be for peace at any price."

"I am not for peace at any price, Betty. There are many things I would go to war for. My dear, you have forgotten the heroic adventures of my early days, I am afraid, although you used to say they were ever so interesting. I fought in a war myself once."

"Yes; long ago, when you were young," Lady Betty said despondingly. "But you are not for peace at any price—that you do say, Sandham? I may tell papa and every one that, mayn't I?"

"I don't fancy Lord Germilion needs to be told that," Morse said rather coldly. "In England, if we don't like a public man, we merely say he is for peace at any price, and think we have disposed of him. I don't fancy Lord Germilion and his friends really believe it of me."

"But," exclaimed Lady Betty eagerly, "they say if you become Prime Minister you will not let England go to war."

"Whether I become Prime Minister or not, Betty, I will always do my best to prevent England from going to war when war is not necessary or justifiable. I shall do my best to prevent this war, dear."

"Then you *are* against the Court," Lady Betty said, the colour dying out of her cheeks at the bare idea.

Morse patted her cheek soothingly. He was determined that he would be very gentle with her. "My dear Betty, you don't know what a dreadful thing you are saying. What do you think would be the outcry among the people if it were supposed that to have a strong opinion against a particular policy, especially against a war policy, were to prove that a public man was against the Court? Talk of republicanism—why, my little wife, your doctrines, if they were correct, would make republicans of three-fourths of the English people."

"I don't understand you one bit," Lady Betty answered; and indeed she answered truly. "But are you really a republican? and do you want to get up a republican party? And are you going in with that unfortunate Masterson and men like that?"

"Why, Betty, I am exactly as I have always been since you knew me, and for long before. I have lived in republics and in communities

which are really republican, and life goes on there very well. I always told you my ideas were republican."

"Yes; but one's ideas—that is nothing. I never thought you meant anything real in all that. I thought it looked odd and pretty and picturesque, and I liked it. But I never thought you really meant it, Sandham—never, oh, never! If I had——" She stopped abruptly.

"If you had, you wouldn't have married me? Is that what you mean?" he asked.

She did not answer at once, but played with her screen for a moment or two. "Sandham," she exclaimed impulsively, "you are not quite as nice to me as you used to be. You are so much graver and colder, and not so comfortable. I don't know why it is, but things seem to have changed between us somehow. We don't think alike, as we always used."

"Used we to think alike always?" he said, more to himself than to her.

"And other people notice it," Lady Betty continued in her light pretty way, stroking the feathers of her screen in a preoccupied manner, as though she were stating a not very important fact. "Lenny said so to me not long ago."

"Lenny!" repeated Morse in a stern, astonished tone. "You talked to the boy Lenny about yourself and me?"

Lady Betty laughed a little uneasily. "Well, not seriously, dear. But you know Lenny has always had a notion that he would like to go into diplomacy—be secretary to some great public man or something of the kind; and he wanted me to ask you, and so that was how the subject came up. You needn't be vexed, Sandham. I fancy that you are a little impatient of Lenny. You don't always take an interest in my toys."

"You have a great many, Betty. Lady Deveril and 'copy' one month, women doctors another, studios and painters a third, Irish distress, American prima donnas, and——" he was going to say, "Australian beauties," thinking of that daughter of Sir Vesey Plympton whom Lady Betty had "run," but stopped short for an instant, and added "mediæval page-boys, and so forth. I admit that your toys are harmless, Betty, and you soon tire of them, so it does not matter, dear."

"Now you are sarcastic and uncomfortable," cried Lady Betty, "and I don't know what to make of you." She seemed to be meditating for a moment, and then said, "I think you are not quite just to me, Sandham. I should never tire of anything or anybody if only there did not always come a point in everything when more is expected from one than human nature—my nature, at any rate—can give."

He looked at her with a strange sort of wonder, an almost compassionate interest, and seemed about to speak, but checked himself.

"For instance," Lady Betty went on, "you will say that I have tired of Lenny because I don't mean to have him so much about me in future. It isn't so in the least. I love the dear picturesque boy, and

I'd do anything for him, and shall miss him horribly—Lenny always made a diversion when anything awkward happened. But he wouldn't remember that he was only just my pretty page. He got silly and sentimental and serious, and so——" She gave her shoulders a little shrug, and her dark eyes glanced up pathetically into her husband's grave face.

"And so," he repeated, with a melancholy smile. "Yes, I understand, Betty. You don't like things and people when they become serious. My political ideas interested you as long as you thought them only a picturesque background to the man you married; but now that you find you have married the background as well as the man you are perplexed and frightened, my dear. Well, I am sorry—sorry that you should have been mistaken in me, sorry if I should have led you into any mistake. But you were mistaken. I always gave you my real opinions; I always meant what I said."

Lady Betty's cheeks grew pale again. She had wandered a little away from the real trouble. "But, Sandham, will you explain to me" —she bent eagerly forward—"I should like to be able to say *something* when people tell me disagreeable things."

"I will try to explain," he answered.

"Do you really want to set up a republic in England and to upset the throne?" she asked, with cheeks still more blanched than before. Her idea of a republic was either a very low-class and vulgar place, where one's coachman sat down to dinner with one, or a place where furies of women danced half-naked about the streets, bearing gory heads on the points of pikes.

"No, Betty," Morse said, with a look of mingled compassion and pain, "I don't want to do anything of the kind. The English people seem to me well content as they are, and I would not put out a hand to disturb them for the sake of the finest theory that ever was broached. You may tell Lord Germilion that if you like; but I don't suppose he will believe it."

"But if one is a republican one wants to have a republic," Lady Betty urged, with a certain amount of plaintive shrewdness.

"In consistency one ought to, I suppose; but life is all more or less a compromise, Betty—in politics, at any rate. I should be glad if the English people some day, at some suitable opportunity, were willing to try a republic; but I don't want to try to force a republic on them."

"At some suitable opportunity!" Lady Betty exclaimed aghast. "Does that mean at the end of the reign? Stopping the succession? Why, that is the very thing they were saying at papa's. They were saying that some people—Mr. Masterson at their head—were trying to get up a plot of the kind—paving the way for a rebellion, and that —oh, Sandham, my dear, they were saying that it was encouraged by —by——"

"By me, Betty?" Morse interrupted almost sternly. "They have said that of me, have they?"

"Not in my hearing," Lady Betty answered, a little frightened by his look and his voice. "Of course I would not listen to anything of the kind. Papa told me they were saying it. But, of course, it is not true."

"Do you think it is true, Betty?"

"My dear Sandham, no; oh no! But, then, I never thought that you were really in earnest about being a republican, and all that."

"Exactly," Morse said grimly; "and as you were mistaken in the one case there is no reason why you should not be mistaken in the other. I quite understand. Well, we have talked this over enough, I think. Never mind me, Betty; I mean, don't trouble about defending me. If they ask you whether it is true that I am concerned in a plot to assassinate the royal family and the bench of bishops, you can only say that you don't know, dear; that you really don't know. For you don't, you see. Then you will be quite on the safe side, and you will have committed yourself to nothing."

There was a tone of scorn in his voice which he could not quite repress. But he looked at the little wistful face with the pure, frightened, anxious eyes, and an unspeakable feeling of pity welled up in his heart. She did not, then, understand him; she could not understand him at all—this bright humming-bird of society, this child-like woman of the world, gracious, graceful, sweet, and yet so incapable of sympathy with his own highest aspirations, his own deepest emotions. At the instant, Koorâli's phrase, "I do not speak the language," flashed through his mind. There was a language, too, which Lady Betty could not speak—the language Koorâli knew so well.

It was very sad; but there was the truth, the unpitying, remorseless truth. He bent to kiss her out of very sorrow for her and for himself. As he looked into her eyes he could not help thinking how curiously like Koorâli she was; and then the strange thought thrust itself into his mind that she was Koorâli without a soul. Sometimes, in after-days, it seemed to him possible that he might have been drawn towards Lady Betty in the first instance by some vague perception of her likeness to the girl he had seen in the Australian dawn. Perhaps he had been all unconsciously seeking his lost ideal, pursuing his distant dream, when he was paying court to the brilliant young Englishwoman who afterwards became his wife; and now he finds that she is not his ideal after all. In one of the stories of the forest Indians he had heard of a youth who passed his life in the pursuit of a phantom woman, always moving before him, never reached. Had he too been thus pursuing a phantom?

She could not understand him; she had never understood him—his wife! There was no help for that. He was cut to the heart, but he did not blame her; he only felt compassion for her. He kissed her on the forehead, and then left her. They parted not in anger, but in coldness. It was the first time they had ever parted in real coldness.

CHAPTER XXV.

PINK SNOW.

A PINK snow of telegrams was shedding itself softly all over England. The needles of the telegraph were clicking and pattering like an incessant shower of sleet and hail. It was the middle of November, and the general elections were going on; and the pink shower was one of their necessary accompaniments. In the clubs, men were rushing eagerly up to every fresh strip of paper affixed to the walls of morning-rooms and corridors. The evening journals kept issuing new editions every half-hour. Congratulations and condolences were crossing each other; wild appeals for advice, for assistance, for the hurrying-up of voters, for demonstration of direct or indirect influence this, that, and the other way, were flying up from the boroughs and the counties to the political head-quarters of the various parties in London.

It was a time of merely pleasing excitement for those who had no friend or brother in the struggle and who were not themselves involved. But, then, a vast number of persons either were themselves involved or had some friend or brother thus situated. The political fortunes of men were being decided daily, hourly. The success of a life's ambition, the sudden check to a promising career, the utter blight of hopes on which all had been staked—these were the events which any moment's message might announce by wire or telephone. Some seven hundred vacant seats to be filled; at least two candidates for almost every place; each candidate representing an eager family and a large circle of friends, all of whom profess to wish him success, and some of whom think it absurd of him to want to get into the House of Commons, and hope in their hearts he may fail of his desire; each constituency containing so many ardent politicians and furious partisans, and unscrupulous wire-pullers, and poor-spirited hangers-on pitifully hunting after temporary appointments paid at so much a day; and messengers and cab-drivers and bill-stickers—all these, and a whole army of other "unnamed demi-gods"—to revive a phrase of Kossuth's eloquent days—were personally interested in the struggle.

Nominally, it was the old struggle between Liberals and Tories. But there was a new and a different issue involved this time. There were two sections of the Liberal party—the old Whigs and the new Radicals or Democrats; and the question was which of these two sections was to come out the stronger after the elections and give laws to the other. The general impression was that the Tories would be worsted in any case. But that was not, after all, so important a matter. They were now in office only because the Liberals did not see their way to work together as one united party. If, after the elections, the same want of union should perchance prevail, the Tories would have to be allowed to remain for the time in office, even though they should be the Ministry of a minority. But it was understood

that the Liberals would among themselves abide by the decision of the constituencies. If the Whigs should come out the stronger, then the Radicals would be bound on their own principles to admit that the voice of the people was the voice of the gods, and to let the Whigs lead them—for the time, at least. If the decision were to be the other way, then the Whigs would have to do once more what they had so often done before, and consent to move on with the times and the Radicals.

Then, again, there was another question—the war policy. Would the Radicals, if they came back in force, go for a war policy? Would Morse go for it? He was denouncing it everywhere now; but if his party came back powerful enough to make him Prime Minister, would he not then bend to the will of the country and go in for a policy of war?

These were the questions disturbing the minds of men—and of women. There was one woman who watched the progress of events with the deepest and keenest interest—an interest all the deeper and the keener because it could find no relief in expression. Kooràli sat in her lonely home, and waited and wondered and hoped, like a solitary woman who listens for some sound to tell her that news is coming from a battle-field whereon fortunes dear to her heart are staked. The pink shower let fall no flake on Kooràli. She received no letter or telegram from Morse. She did not expect any; she knew he would not send any. She knew that it was right he should not send any; and yet she watched the hours anxiously. She wondered at her almost absolute isolation in the midst of that great struggle; and she seemed to herself useless; and life was drear.

The Crichton Kenways had been for some weeks settled in London. Crichton was now a gentleman at large, for his successor had arrived from South Britain, and was installed at the office in Victoria Street. Crichton was not altogether displeased at the opportunity given him for cultivating his country tastes and pursuits. He was gaining quite a reputation in the hunting-field, and had contrived to afford himself another hunter. He had had several invitations for partridge and pheasant shooting; and on the whole he was very well occupied and a good deal away from home. He had even been exercising his talents as an orator, and speaking for several of the advanced Liberal candidates at the elections. He cursed the want of means which prevented him from standing himself for a Lyndfordshire constituency; but even in this respect his luck had favoured him. Old Mrs. Kenway died just after the visit to the Priory which had been so memorable to Kooràli, and the modest sum in ready money dropping in, as Crichton expressed it, "at the very nick of time," relieved him for the moment from his most pressing difficulties. The relief would not, he knew, be of long duration; the mountain of debt was still rolling up. But at at all events he was able to start a fresh account at his tailor's, to throw a sop to the most rapacious of his Jewish creditors, and to pay off his overdraft at the bank and restore confidence to the heart of Mr. Bonhote, the manager.

In regard to Morse and Kooràli, and the bettering of his own prospects, Crichton still thought it good policy to let matters slide, or seem to do so. Kooràli, on her side, was true to her principle of self-repression; and since that night at the Priory her relations with her husband had been friendly on the surface. She saw so much less of him, that it was comparatively easy to keep on the conventional plane. And then the elections were the absorbing subject of interest. Nothing could be done or decided about their future till the country had declared for or against the Ministry in power; for or against Morse and his Radicals. Crichton was as keenly excited over the political situation as a gambler whose fortune depends upon the turn of the wheel, but he tried to make his excitement appear to be of a patriotic and purely impersonal kind. He began to fancy himself an authority on political questions, talked as if he were behind the scenes; and indeed, with the egotism which was his habitual happiness, believed that his Lyndfordshire speeches and an article he wrote about this time in one of the monthlies would aid considerably in swaying the destinies of England—it might almost be said, of Europe.

He had proclaimed himself an advanced Liberal, but he avoided as much as possible committing himself upon the war question. He was anxious that there might still be a loophole for him, should the Tory or moderate Liberal interest predominate. He read every word uttered by the prominent men of both parties—or rather of the three parties, for Morse and his "Peaceful Progressionists," as they were sometimes called, threatened the disintegration of the Liberal party.

In his heart of hearts Kenway did not quite know whether he wished Morse to succeed or not. Unquestionably, if Morse did succeed there would be a grand chance for Kenway's bettered fortunes. But, then, even if Morse came out strong after the elections, might he not throw his opportunities away on some mad scruple; and, then, would not Kenway be "altogether out of it," to use his own phrase? Would it not be better if he had "gone dead" with the more moderate Liberals from the first; or, indeed, with the Tories? He felt angry with Morse sometimes, as if Morse had talked him into the course he had adopted. Moreover, he felt bitterly jealous of Morse, simple because he knew that Kooràli thought Morse a hero, and regarded him—her husband—in no such heroic light. Even while he was throwing Kooràli in Morse's way, he hated Morse for that very reason. He hated Morse because he did not get at once all the advantages he hoped for through Kooràli's influence; he would perhaps have hated him still more if he had got them. Had he been a man of deeper feeling for good or for ill, life would have been intolerable to him. But an indulgent Heaven had endowed him with a happy levity of nature; and while there was a pleasant country house open to him, and an excellent dinner to be had now and then, and any chance, however airy, of to-morrow mending the luck of to-day, Kenway could never feel quite out of sorts with the world. He was, in one regard, the very opposite to poor Enoch Arden. Enoch, we are told, "was not all unhappy; his resolve sus-

tained him." Kenway was not all unhappy; his lack of resolve sustained him.

Kooràli saw almost nothing of Morse now, heard nothing of him, except through the papers and through Lady Betty, who was in London, and came several times to see her. There was, to Kooràli, a mournful interest in these visits. Morse's wife, lovely, sweet, and unstable—fresh from some aristocratic drawing-room where Jingoism had been rampant and the Ultra-Radicals denounced as would-be destroyers of England's supremacy and enemies of the sovereign—was a strange, sad study to Kooràli. Lady Betty talked to Kooràli—an outsider and, to her, half a foreigner—as she would not have talked to one of her own set; and she allowed this to be apparent in a pretty, simple way, which touched the Australian woman.

Lady Betty was in a curious, half-elated, half-distrustful frame of mind. She was elated at the extent of her husband's influence over the nation, alarmed at the effect it might have upon their own immediate surroundings. Lady Betty was entirely conservative in tendency and education, and had never felt any true sympathy with her husband's aims—had never even understood what they were. Till now that had mattered little. There had been no need for husband and wife to take a definite stand together. Lady Betty had lived on the surface of society, and, in a measure, did Morse service by her eclecticism. It was understood that in Lady Betty's drawing-room all kinds of extremists were to be found picturesquely grouped as in a sort of political and social kaleidoscope. Morse had fallen into a becoming attitude, and till the break-up of the Administration to which he belonged, Lady Betty had never felt any real uneasiness as to his political career. But now that the party phrases had become battle-cries, now that England was racked to its very centre by party strife, now that Morse had steered boldly to the front, taking the wind out of the sails of other leading Radicals, Lady Betty began to feel frightened and uncomfortable. She fancied herself less popular in the Court and aristocratic circles, which were all in favour of war and resentful of the growth of a democratic party. Some high personages remonstrated with Lady Betty upon her husband's utterances. She wished him to be a Prime Minister, but she did not wish him to be a Prime Minister notoriously out of favour at Court. Her own people were bitterly opposed to all Morse's views; Lord Forrest, the only one who might have had something to say in their defence, had gone abroad, openly declaring that he wanted to be out of the way till the hurly-burly was done. Wherever she went, Lady Betty heard of nothing but politics, and was made to feel herself upon the wrong side. It was quite a new experience for her, and not a pleasant one. Then, somehow, there had crept about rumours of an alliance between Morse and the Socialists, and of dark, revolutionary plans; and poor Lady Betty, knowing her husband's friendship with Masterson, had qualms of doubt and fear, and when embarrassing little incidents occurred could not laugh them off, as had been her custom. Nor could she talk

everything over frankly with Morse. A curious chill had crept up between them, and she had a feeling of separateness from him and of inability to enter into his mood. He was not less gentle and considerate, not less affectionate—indeed, sometimes his manner had a melancholy tenderness which set her wondering a little. It was just a faint indication of some want of generosity in Lady Betty's nature that she accepted it as an acknowledgment of wrong to her—of course, she thought, it was a wrong that he should not modify his attitude a little in deference to her opinions and associations and friends. Lady Betty was not sensitive enough to be alive to what was passing through Morse's mind, but he was able to read hers. It is the curse of firmly strung natures, that an impression has sometimes the determining strength of an act with them, and that they cannot close mind and eye against impressions. To paint well, it is said, we should not see too well, should not have eyes that take in every detail. To get on well in life one should be mentally shortsighted.

"Dear Mrs. Kenway," Lady Betty said one day to Kooràli, "you ought to be very thankful that your husband is not a Radical—at least, I suppose he is one—but not too advanced; and, then, he isn't in Parliament, or in the heart of things, don't you know."

"I think I should be very thankful and very proud if my husband were 'in the heart of things' here, Lady Betty," answered Kooràli, smiling a little sadly.

"You are a republican—oh yes, I know"—said Lady Betty. "I don't mind it at all in you. I think you used to encourage my husband a little in his notions, and I've heard you agree with the American Minister that monarchy is only 'dressed-up dummyism.' That sort of thing is quite natural and picturesque in Australians and Americans, but, of course, it is different with us. The Tories were in power before I married. And then, you see, there's the result of the Court training that Sandham used to tease me about." Lady Betty laughed softly. "These elections and the war have made people so horribly in earnest, and I think you *have* reason, Mrs. Kenway, to be thankful that your husband is not the future Radical Prime Minister who, every one says, is going to turn England topsy-turvy."

"Every one, Lady Betty?" exclaimed Kooràli with warmth. "A Radical Prime Minister must be the choice of the nation."

"Oh, well!" said Lady Betty, with a pretty little shrug of her shoulders, "I think 'the nation' is all very well as an abstract quantity, don't you know? and a faithful shepherd is very picturesque in open-air theatricals at Coombe and that sort of thing; but when it comes to letting haymakers settle our foreign policy for us—well, I think I prefer the feudal system."

"It is not the agricultural labourers who disagree with you," said Kooràli. "They are all voting against the farmers, who want peace. It's the farmers and the educated working-men of the cities, Lady Betty, that are supporting your husband."

"My dear Mrs. Kenway, you *do* know about it. You know ever so

much more than I do. Sandham must have found you a much apter pupil than ever he found me, I am afraid."

"I had the advantage of knowing nothing and of having no opinions formed," Kooràli said, with a smile. "My mind was a blank sheet of paper."

"Until Sandham wrote on it," Lady Betty answered graciously, and supplying for Kooràli's words an application Kooràli had not thought of giving them. "Yes; it does make a difference. I was brought up in such a way—in a narrow way, I dare say; but one can't help the influences that surround one at the beginning. Sometimes I wish Sandham had converted me; for I don't suppose now I could ever have converted him. Of course one would like to feel exactly as one's husband felt; and to go with him in everything. But I don't think he ever tried to convert me; I really don't believe he ever did. And, of course, if he did not try, how was I to know that he wanted me to be anything other than what I was?"

Lady Betty was arguing thus to herself more than to Kooràli, arguing in a half-plaintive, half-complaining sort of way. Kooràli felt deeply touched. It might have been well, she thought, if Lady Betty's husband had tried to bring her over to his own views; and yet she could easily understand how a strong man would prefer to spare that sweet, that gently frivolous nature the trouble of a political conversion or a political education. It is the generous mistake of the strong, when the strong are generous, to fancy that the weak can by any manner of protection be enabled to evade the perplexities of the life that is around them, and that are, like the east wind, sure to find their way in.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PROGRESSIVE CLUB.

THE elections were over and Morse's hopes of an independent party were gone. He had had up to the last a faint belief that it would be possible to get together after the elections, and by virtue of their mandate, a party strong enough to repudiate the foreign policy of the Government and to save the country from war. The elections killed this hope. The result was that the Conservative party was in a hopeless minority. The Liberals united would be in a strong majority; and of the two sections which made up the party, Morse's friends were much the stronger. Morse was the coming Prime Minister, every one said. All eyes turned to him. It became known that the Government would meet the new Parliament, and would hold on until a vote of confidence ejected them. This would happen almost at once, as a matter of course, people said; and then would come the Liberal party, led by a Radical Prime Minister. "Happy man, Morse!" the world said. "Not yet quite forty-five years old, and already at the height of

his ambition! Prime Minister—the first Radical Prime Minister of England!" When the news was telegraphed to South Britain, the capital of the colony was illuminated in honour of the triumph of the man who had once been at the head of the Government there.

Ninety-nine men out of every hundred hailed Morse already as Prime Minister. Yes; but the hundredth man—as Morse himself would have put it—the hundredth man, who knew better, what did he say? Morse had already made up his mind. The majority of the Liberal party was in favour of a war policy; and Morse would not be the Minister of a war policy; at least, under such conditions. He was no peace-at-any-price man; he was convinced that peace had sometimes many evils far worse than war. He did not believe that life, mere breath, is so great a thing as to be worth keeping at the sacrifice of any noble purpose, or the expense of any national cause. But he was convinced that war just then, and war for such a purpose, would be unjust; that it would come as the result of a whole system of policy of which he heartily disapproved; which he detested; and there was but one course open to him.

Morse came up to town immediately after his own re-election. Lady Betty, who had gone to her father's place during the last part of the struggle, did not hasten up. She had heard Morse's decision from him, and she was hurt and troubled by it. She could not understand it; she could not understand him. She was very much displeased with him in her pretty pouting little way. There had been another small scene between them, in which she had implored him, with all the earnestness and logic she had at command, to yield to the pressure of public opinion, to seize his opportunity, to espouse the war policy and ingratiate himself with the Court party, and to justify his change of front by the changed aspect of the situation. He had listened to her arguments and her entreaties, and had coldly, almost sternly, refused. Lady Betty was deeply hurt by the refusal; she thought she had a right to ask, and that he ought to do what she asked him so earnestly to do. If he were to ask her to do anything, would she not do it? Ah, yes, indeed she would. She wanted him to be Prime Minister. She wanted to flaunt him and his great position in the faces of the relatives who once tried to look down on him; and she wanted him to be at the head of a War Ministry. For all her sweetness and gentleness her bosom throbbed at the thought of England redeeming all her past glory and as victorious in a great war. Would not her father and all her relatives be proud of her husband then? And she wanted Morse to give ministerial places to ever so many of her friends. There were some dear women to whom she had already all but promised places in the Ministry for their clever husbands. Moreover, some of the things Lady Betty had been hearing at her father's rankled more and more in her mind. Lord Germilion's friends would keep saying that it was so un-English to think of truckling to any European power; and she was particularly anxious that her husband should prove himself a thorough Englishman, with plenty of fight in him.

So Lady Betty remained at her father's in the country, and Morse came up to town.

Among the letters he found awaiting him was one from "The Progressive Club." The Progressive Club was a peculiar sort of institution. It had been started some years before, for the purpose of spreading the views of intellectual democracy among the more educated classes. Its arena was not very large, to be sure. The club consisted of twenty-four members, of whom half were chosen from within and half chosen from without the House of Commons. Among the latter half women were eligible for election, and there were, in fact, several ladies in the club. The propaganda was carried on in a very easy and unpretentious way. The club dined together several times in each session and discussed the political topics of the hour. As regards principles there was not usually much opening for controversy. It was a case of preaching to the converted; but on expediency, detail, the time when, and manner how, and so forth, often very animated discussion took place. There was no speech-making; the members sat round the table after dinner and each gave an opinion on the prescribed subject in turn. The club had no fixed habitation. It ranged among a few chosen hotels and restaurants in the winter and spring, and it expanded to the Ship at Greenwich, or the Star and Garter, Richmond, in the summer. One of its fundamental principles was that no member must hold office in a Government. The mere fact of his taking a place in an Administration disqualified him. Morse had been a member of the club for some years, and had then been disqualified by his acceptance of a place in the late Government. Now he was again a member, having been elected at once—or at least on the first vacancy, when his colleagues and himself went out of office; and just now everybody was saying that he was about to be disqualified again. The letter Morse found awaiting him was an invitation to attend a dinner of the club that very day.

"All right," Morse said to himself. "As well there as anywhere else; better there, perhaps, than anywhere else. The sooner it is known the less trouble there will be. I don't want to be 'sent for.'"

It was a Sunday; and the dinner of the club was appointed for that day because it was thought that the coming week would probably bring forth some important political combinations, and the club wanted to discuss them beforehand. The particular subject set down for that evening's discussion was "The Duty of a Radical under the Present Political Conditions." It was the title of the subject that decided Morse on going to the dinner. The club might not, perhaps, be very important as a political organization; but some of its members were men of undoubted political capacity and position. One or two were men who would assuredly expect to be called upon to take part in an Administration formed by Morse. So Morse resolved that he would keep out of the way of any of his political acquaintances until he had said his say at the dinner of the Progressive Club. He would have

longed to call on Kooràli. He knew she was at home. He thought perhaps she would expect to see him. If she knew that he had returned to town, he thought she would be disappointed if he did not go to see her. He would have dearly liked to tell her first of his fixed determination. She would understand it, he knew, he well knew. Yet it did not seem to him as if he ought to go to see her, as if he could go to see her. Not one word of love had ever been spoken between them. He might have gone to see her now as well as in other days, and no one would have thought anything about it. But he could not go. To do so would not be in accord with that code of duty he had prescribed for himself, and which had been tacitly understood between them. He knew that things were not now as they had been before those days in Lyndfordshire. He knew that he had come to think far too much about her; and the terrible thought, half fear, half certainty, that she had come to think too much about him, was always present in his mind. "No," he said to himself, "I'll not see her again, unless chance should throw us together in the ordinary way—I'll not go to see her."

He read a heap of letters and papers, and he saw no one. Then he felt weary of reading and went out into the Park. It was, as has been said, a Sunday; the time was now not long past noon. It was a fine cheery winter day, and a soft sun seemed almost as if it were moulded into a bank of golden cloud and mist. The Park was full of people; not merely fashionable people of the Row, but eager, excited groups of unfashionable persons as well. Morse looked with curiosity at each group and scene as he passed it. Here there was a Salvationist preaching to his crowd, and calling on them to arise and be converted; there a social democrat harangued his little group, and denounced the political and social laws which make the working-man and the working-man's wife and daughter the victims of the capitalist. In another place a Peace Society lecturer held forth on the horrors of war, and called on all who loved the peace and prosperity of their native land to oppose any and every Minister who strove to drive the country over the precipice and into a great continental struggle. Here and there a republican orator dilated on the luxury of Courts, and made special reference to the Civil List and the misery of the poor. Under the trees the question of Mr. Bradlaugh's election was vehemently expounded and fiercely argued. Far away the smart pedestrians in the Park were beginning to pace their formal monotonous promenade. The preachers, orators, and audiences were nothing to them. The preachers might have been preaching, the orators spouting, the audiences wide-mouthed listening, for successive Sundays in many years so far as they were concerned. They would have seen, perhaps, that something was going on, but they would never have taken the trouble to ask or to think about it, or what it meant, or what it was. This impressed itself upon the mind of Morse as he stood to hear what one of the speech-makers had to say. "Are we not still the two nations?" he asked himself, "just the same as when Disraeli wrote

'Sybil'? The nation which amuses itself; the nation which works and suffers."

Few men could be less egotistic or self-conscious than Morse. It did not occur to him while he was standing on the verge of the crowd that he was a conspicuous public personage, and that some one would be sure to recognize him. He was for the moment not in the politician's mood. He had become a dreamer again, and he was meditating vaguely over the prospects of these two nations settled side by side, and yet to all appearance divided hopelessly in interests and feelings. Suddenly he heard his name called out; first by one voice, then by another, and then by the whole crowd; and he soon saw that the crowd was swelled by another crowd, and yet another. In fact, he found himself surrounded by a great throng, the centre of a large popular meeting, and the meeting was shouting as with one throat for him to address them.

Morse had no more reverence for the dignity of statesmanship than Macaulay had for the dignity of history. He did not see any reason why a man who had once been a Cabinet Minister should not speak to a meeting of his fellow-countrymen in the open air. Without troubling himself to think about the matter, he accepted the invitation, mounted the extemporized platform, and found himself delivering a speech to a Sunday meeting in Hyde Park.

He had the eloquence of clear purpose and strong straightforward utterance, with a certain flavour of the emotional, and even the poetic, which lifted him from the conventional and the commonplace.

"Desist from the denunciation of the rich," he said; "they can't help being rich any more than you can help being poor. You don't want them to give you any of their money; you would not take it, I hope. You are poor, most of you, but you are not paupers or beggars. What we want is a better system; a better adjustment of burdens; more freedom to help ourselves; more room; more light; more air; more elasticity. We want a policy which shall not be the policy of the placeman and the partisan. We want to have the people of these countries thought of and cared for, in the first place. I am sorry if the Eastern Question is not all right; but I am much more sorry for the condition of things in the East End of London. That is my Eastern question. The Greeks have my sympathies; but England's business just now is with the unemployed poor here, at home. England's *prestige*? Yes; I long to see England's *prestige* made to shine to all the world—the *prestige* of a nation with all its classes united, industrious, and happy. I long to see England crowned with glory; the glory of honesty, happiness, and peace; a *prestige* of which the light shall shine for the guidance of all the nations of the earth."

The whole crowd took up the full meaning of his words and cheered tumultuously. Masterson, haranguing his own little group under some distant trees, his long grey locks floating in the wind, found himself all but deserted, and stopped in the middle of his oration to ask what was going on. He was told that Mr. Morse was addressing

the people, and was declaring against foreign wars; and Masterson would have liked to run and kiss Morse's feet. He did indeed bring his speech to a speedy close, and hastened to where he was told Morse was speaking; but by the time he got there the speech was over and Morse was gone.

That evening the news was all over London that Morse had been addressing a public meeting under the Reformers' Tree in Hyde Park; and elderly politicians wondered what the world was coming to, and dowagers shook their heads and declared that they felt so sorry, oh, so very, *very* sorry, for poor dear Lady Betty! It must be such a grief to her, they said; but then they added that they always expected something of the kind. You can't marry a man like *that*, a republican and a democrat, and Heaven knows what else, without having to suffer for it. Some hoped poor Lord Germillion would not come to know of it; and others asked, Would it not be well to write to him at once, and tell him of it, and see whether something could not be done?

Meanwhile Morse, wholly indifferent to what the dowagers and the elderly politicians might be saying about him, made his way to the quarters of the Progressive Club. The club held this day's meeting in a great new gloomy-looking hotel. Members of the club did not dress for dinner; a fact which rather disconcerted Lady Deveril, who had recently been elected, and who was proud of her arms and shoulders. Lady Deveril had had a quarrel with the Dames of the Primrose League, and suddenly found herself a convinced Radical. She was understood to be engaged in the production of a political novel; and she had succeeded in getting herself elected to fill a vacancy on the roll of members of the Progressive Club. This was her first day of dining with the club.

There were three ladies present this day besides Lady Deveril. There was Lady Constance Arklow, daughter-in-law of a great Whig peer, the heaviness of whose Whig dogmatism was believed to have driven Lady Constance into incurable Radicalism. She had a rather mannish air of independence, a sallow face, a habit of wrinkling up her eyes, and a generally humorous look. Not that she was in the least bit humorous. She took life rather seriously. Lady Constance was revolutionary in everything; no institution was sacred from her regenerating curiosity. She was the authoress of a work on "Polygamy and Polyandry in Civilized and Uncivilized Nations," which was understood to treat its subjects in a cool, scientific sort of way.

Mrs. Reginald Falconer was an advocate of woman's rights; but she was entirely unlike the woman's rights' advocate of the conventional type, the caricaturist's pattern. She was a pretty, bright, winsome young woman; a slender creature, who prattled so pleasantly and artlessly, and got off such smart and shining little epigrams, that she might have beguiled even an old bachelor into a momentary weakness for the cause she so bewitchingly advocated. Mr. Piercy, the scientist, alone was proof against her arguments and her fascinations.

"I don't see the use of giving children sweets overnight in order to give them a black dose in the morning," was his somewhat gruff reply to Mrs. Falconer's sweet appeal.

She turned away with a shrug of her shapely shoulders to greet a more hopeful convert.

The other lady, with the face of an enthusiastic St. Monica, was Mrs. Gage, who had a seat on one of the metropolitan school boards, and who had become known to the world by her persevering advocacy of a scheme for the amalgamation of all the churches into one, on the principle of general and equal compromise, each giving up a little of its own belief in consideration of a similar surrender made by every other. When Morse came into the room Mrs. Gage was earnestly endeavouring to induce Father St. Maurice to admit the principles on which she based her scheme. He listened to her with a sweet, compassionate patience, which was in itself an interesting study.

There was a little flutter when Morse entered. "The hero of the hour," murmured Lady Deveril; and she had sympathetic inquiries to make concerning dear Lady Betty, which rather irritated Morse. There were also some inquiries for Mrs. Kenway. It had been rumoured that Kooràli was to be elected a member of the Progressive Club. A woman said to enjoy the confidence of the coming Prime Minister demands some consideration. The mention of Kooràli's name grated upon Morse still more. He escaped from the subject, and congratulated Lady Deveril upon having, metaphorically speaking, exchanged the reaping hook for the sword, and upon having given up the mild pursuit of "copy" in fashionable drawing-rooms for the more exciting study of politics.

The men of the party mustered stronger than the women, and were all more or less figures in London life, and liable at this crisis to attacks from interviewers. Perhaps one of the most influential persons was the editor of a great daily newspaper. A flash of something more than interest passed over his imperturbable face as Morse nodded to him. But he only stroked his beard reflectively, and began talking to his next neighbour of a volume of memoirs that had lately come out. He never hunted for information, though he got it earlier than any other editor in London, but waited, like the spider in his web, concealing his rapacious instinct under a sort of literary priggism. He wrote biographies in his leisure hours, and had started a school of doctrinaires, who wrote biographies, too, and laid down the law on everything.

Two younger sons were in the party, each of whom had gone into training for office, and both of whom had got so far as to be actually in the House of Commons. Foreign affairs gave Lord Albert Folger his chosen field. Lord Albert regarded the world as his artichoke, to be devoured leaf by leaf. Wherever there was a war he hurried to the scene of battle. If an insurrection broke out anywhere, Lord Albert Folger was a spectator of the progress of events as quickly as steamer, train, horse, mule, camel, or ostrich could carry him to the spot. The

moment some new man started up in foreign politics anywhere, Lord Albert went for him, was introduced to him, compared views with him, and came home and talked about him in the House of Commons, and wrote about him in the newspapers. He was well acquainted with Arabi Pasha, had had more than one conversation with Mr. O'Donovan Rossa, and tried to cheer up the latest hours of Louis Riel. He made an effort to get to speech of the Mahdi in the Mahdi's lifetime, and got as far as Dongola, when he was mistaken for a French renegade and stopped and sent back to Cairo.

Lord Albert had lately become a devoted adherent of Morse and his fortunes, and saw himself, in anticipation, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, with his chief in the House of Lords—master of the situation, as Lord Beaconsfield describes the holder of so enviable a position. He was particularly anxious to see Morse to-day, because he hoped to get from him, in an indirect way, some idea as to whether there would be time for him to run to Athens and see how things were really looking there, before anything serious was done in Parliament.

The Honourable Stephen Sinclair, a young man with one of those saturnine countenances which express a lofty contempt for all things created, had gone into training in a different sort of way. He was for mastering facts and figures. He had amassed the greatest amount of inaccurate statistical information acquired by any living man. There was no subject open to human study or even human fancy on which he had not figures to give. His knowledge was offensive. He was only happy when he was showing people that they were all wrong about everything. Since he came into the room he had accomplished two gratifying feats. He had put Mr. Piercy into a passion by endeavouring to prove to him that he was utterly mistaken about a scientific question, to the study of which Mr. Piercy had devoted about half his life; and Mr. Piercy was sixty-four, while Mr. Sinclair was only twenty-six. Then he addressed himself to Lady Constance Arklow, and made her almost cry by insisting that the figures on which she had founded the greater part of the theories developed in her book were altogether erroneous, and by giving her what he assured her she would find to be the right figures, and which would prove to demonstration the very contrary of all that she had asserted. After this Mr. Sinclair bounced briskly about the room, putting out people's theories here and there, as if they were so many candles he was sent to extinguish.

There was a Scottish professor, whose principal political theme was proportional representation, and who commonly demonstrated the simplicity and clearness of his system with a lucidity which made unfortunate listeners, trying their best to understand it, become possessed with the fearsome idea that they were getting softening of the brain. There was a man whose theme was India, of which he regarded England as a mere dependency. There was an advocate of peace, a handsome, grave man, with a full white beard and moustache,

and a face which reminded one of some portrait of a Venetian senator, and suggested that its owner ought to be attired in black velvet. The business in life of this politician was to write treatises and make speeches on the wisdom of universal disarmament, and the establishment of an international council, composed of one delegate from each of the nations of the world, civilized and uncivilized alike, for the settlement of all disputes. He had convinced himself that the Great Pyramid was intended to be regarded as the centre of the earth, and he therefore proposed that the council of al' nations should assemble at its base. One incidental blessing which he hoped to bring out by his international council was the adoption of an international language. He justly argued that as the council swelled in numbers, and began to receive delegate after delegate from the various peoples and tribes, it would be found that some of the delegates did not understand what others were saying. It would, therefore, be needful to adopt some common form of discourse, and each delegate as he returned to his home would naturally teach this language to his own people. The result would be the gradual institution of one tongue common to all the nations of the earth. He sometimes admitted, with a sigh, that he did not expect to have this great object accomplished in his lifetime.

The dinner was held in a great bare room, with a painted ceiling and a good deal of ornamentation and tarnished gilding about it; but at the same time an air of sumptuousness was displayed in the hothouse flowers and the table appointments, for the Progressive Club prided itself upon being in advance of seasons and upon the *recherché* nature generally of its repasts.

The club appointed each day a chairman to preside at the dinner-table and the subsequent discussion. The choice this time fell on Mr. Weatherby Cutts, a person of great promise it was understood, who had just been elected to Parliament. Mr. Weatherby Cutts was from the provinces, but had now settled himself and his family in town. He was a big, florid man, rather what the Americans would call fleshy than fat. He was provincial of the provincial in his manners. He was argumentative, dogmatic, aggressive; a man evidently determined not under any conditions to be done by anybody, and who was still under the impression that all London had entered into a conspiracy to do him. His great ambition was to live in London, and at the same time to show to all Londoners how utterly inferior they were in everything to the people of the great provincial town from which he came. Mr. Cutts had long been accustomed to carry all before him at the school board and in the town council of his native city, and he would have given evidence of this habitude if he had been suddenly introduced into the midst of a congress of great ambassadors, a conclave of cardinals, or what Napoleon promised to Talma, a pitful of kings.

Mr. Cutts bullied the waiters a good deal during the dinner; and, indeed, he occasionally bullied the guests as well, if they showed any inclination to express any satisfaction with the way in which things

were done in that hotel. Mr. Cutts would not allow any such expressions of approval to pass without loudly making it known that that sort of thing might do in London, but it would not be endured in his native town. One moment of fearful crisis came. The bill of fare spoke of asparagus with the roast, whereas the waiters were handing round sea-kale. This was a clear case for the dignity of the chairman to assert itself. Mr. Cutts summoned the head waiter; he would not condescend to express his remonstrance to any mere underling. The head waiter came and stood meekly; his head a little on one side, and inclined towards Mr. Cutts, a listening attitude with deference thrown in. Mr. Cutts sternly asked why one vegetable was in the bill of fare and another on the tables. The head waiter did not know; supposed there had been an alteration made.

"By whose authority, sir?" Mr. Cutts demanded, with folded arms and knitted brows. "By whose authority? That is what I want to know." He looked round the table triumphantly, as if to say, "Now you feeble Londoners can see what manner of men we are in my town, and how slight is the chance of any one getting the better of us." "By whose authority," he again demanded, "was this change made?"

The head waiter timidly suggested that it might have been by the authority of the manager.

"Send the manager here, sir, instantly—instantly," Mr. Cutts said in loud and appalling tones, and he struck both hands down upon the table.

"Is it really worth while?" Father St. Maurice softly interposed, gently shrugging his shoulders. His feelings towards Mr. Cutts were beginning to be very much like those which a thoroughbred Arab steed might be supposed to have towards a noisy, lumbering, big-footed dray horse, or a Damascus blade to a piece of rusty iron hoop with a cross handle put to it and thus converted into a weapon.

"Another burden added to the cares of life," murmured Lady Deveril plaintively; "the difficulty of providing people with something to eat. The game season is on certainly, and one doesn't need to take refuge in calf's head as a novelty; but who can blame an hotel manager for backing out of asparagus at £4 a bundle."

"Well, it is pretty certain," Morse interposed good-humouredly, "that we shan't get the asparagus now; and, perhaps, it is hardly worth while having a conference with the manager."

Mr. Cutts shrugged his shoulders more emphatically than St. Maurice had done; threw out his hands, and flung himself back in his chair with the manner of one who would say, "If you poor people really like to be done, why, have it your own way; I don't want to protect you against your will."

There was a good deal of general talk about the late elections, the grouping of parties, the tripartite formation of the new House, the tactics of this or that member of a Cabinet supposed to be on its last legs, or of an understanding arrived at between leaders of different factions; of a threatening note, addressed by the Prime Minister to

the antagonistic State, which it was thought would precipitate war; of the chances for and against a Liberal Ministry,—all this discussed, with a good many veiled references to Morse, who, however, at this stage did not enter much into the political conversation, but devoted himself principally to the ladies of the party.

Something was said about Masterson, and certain rumoured socialist anti-war demonstrations.

"I shouldn't be surprised at anything Masterson might do—short of dynamite or the dagger. I think he would draw the line there," said Lord Albert Folger.

"Don't you admire him!" exclaimed Lady Constance Arklow, looking round the company generally. "I think he is perfectly splendid!"

"He's a plucky fellow, but he is a lunatic," said Mr. Piercy. "I suppose you'd call his lunacy enthusiasm?"

"Enthusiasm is the spur which the gods use," put in Father St. Maurice's liquid voice.

"Enthusiasm is the curse of the individual or of the nation," growled Mr. Weatherby Cutts. "It leads to prison in the one case, and to taxes and trade depression in the other."

"Oh, I sympathize with the enthusiasts," said the pretty woman's-rights' advocate. "They are laughed at by their generation and deified by all succeeding ones. Isn't it so, now? It's like genius, don't you know. Ah," she sighed, "I'm an enthusiast myself. I wish that I were a genius too." And she beamed on the editor.

"We should none of us mind being tarred with that brush," cheerfully replied the man of letters.

"Well, but don't you think there is something glorious in the idea of a great nation rising up in battle?" Lady Deveril asked, reverting to the original topic. "I mean, of course, in a rightful cause. I should not like England to go to war in a wrong cause; but then, the right, you know—when one sees the right—oh, I do think it is so delightful; it is like the Crusades all over again. I adore the Crusades."

"When England joined in the Crusades," Father St. Maurice said seriously, "she had a national faith. She could pray for light, and she could believe. That true Christian faith she has long lost. When she finds it again she will be able to know what is a rightful cause, and light will come to her to show her where and when and how to strike."

"I haven't any patience with the true Christian's proprietary interest in faith," cried Mrs. Gage, an odd gleam lighting up her St. Monica face. "Why should we be immortal? Why must we have souls? Why? Because we can think and feel? Because our emotions are wonderful? So is the flame of gas; but the flame goes out, and there's an end of it."

Mr. Piercy nodded his head distinctly, but he screwed his cynical lips more tightly together. He did not condescend to lend his scientific authority to the support of Mrs. Gage's arguments.

"I am sure I have tried to have a faith," Lady Deveril said, with a melancholy look upwards and a sigh. "I have been at ever so many meetings of the Theosophical Society, and I am a member of the Society of Psychical Research. I'm bound to say that I found a great deal of 'copy' there, but I didn't find much else. I've tried so many things," Lady Deveril said plaintively, "as dear Lady Betty can testify, Mr. Morse; for she too had something of my thirst for experience, though she didn't look at it altogether from the point of view of the higher life—the artistic higher life, you know. I'm not thinking of Mr. Laurence Oliphant—I only hope that politics may bring me more satisfaction than the rest—and be more profitable. It is the duty of a writer to study everything," emphatically pursued Lady Deveril, after a little pause, during which she took breath and fixed the editor's eye. "I spent half an hour to-day talking to a costermonger—getting at his point of view. He had such a donkey. I'd have bought it if I could have kept it on the leads. The ambition of my life has always been to drive a donkey cart out slumming—a point of sympathy, don't you see. But unless you understand their language, it's very hard to make them go."

"Come back to the war; that's the point. Are we going to have a war or are we not?" said Mr. Weatherby Cutts.

"Oh, I suppose there can't be much doubt that we are going to have a war," some one promptly answered.

"Very well, then. Now, I wan't to come to the point at once. If we are to have the war, who is going to carry it on? Is it to be left in the hands of the Tories? I for one say, no, no; emphatically no. If the thing must be done, I say, let us do it. Kick them out at once, and let our chaps come in; that's business."

The dinner came to an end at last; the waiters left the room, and now the real conversation, the business of the evening, was to set in. Mr. Cutts, as chairman, endeavoured to give a tone of his own to the whole proceedings. He set about opening the business in a formal speech which promised to be of some length, and displayed the style admired in his town council. The honorary secretary, Mr. Crewell, mildly interposed. Mr. Cutts stopped and bent down to listen. Mr. Crewell explained that it was not the habit of the club to make formal speeches. The proceedings were usually conversational, each member giving his or her opinion in turn, and remaining seated while speaking.

"Oh, indeed! that's your way here!" Mr. Cutts observed. "All right. It don't seem to me a good plan;" but he stopped his speech abruptly and submitted to the queer ways of London.

"Perhaps I may be allowed to say, for the information of new members of the club, and our chairman among the rest," the honorary secretary blandly observed, "that it is usual on such an occasion as this—I mean after a general election, or during an important political crisis—to ask if there is any member who has any reason to believe that he or any other member, also a member of Parliament, is likely soon to cease to belong to the club. Of course we do not expect indis-

creet disclosures; but where a disclosure may be properly made, I think I am warranted in saying that the club would be pleased to receive it at the earliest possible moment—in fact, that one of the objects of the club is the elucidation of political problems by means of such informal disclosures. Of course, if confidence is desired, confidence will be absolutely preserved."

There was a general cry of "Hear hear," and all eyes were turned on Morse.

"We expect our chief to give us some information," said Lady Deveril softly, but yet in a tone which was distinctly heard all over the table, and she turned her soft and sentimental eyes upon the hero of the moment.

There was a pause; a general silence; a straining of anxiety. Morse looked suddenly up and saw that every gaze was fixed on him. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began, with a smile——

"Now for it," Lord Albert murmured, and his eyes sparkled in anticipation of the happy moment when he should be invited to become Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs with his chief in the House of Lords; when he should, in fact, be master of the situation.

"Of course," Morse went on, "I can't affect to misunderstand the meaning of what our friend, Mr. Crewell, has just said. I am all the better able to understand it, because I had once before the same sort of appeal made to me in this club." Cries of "Hear, hear," and loud applause. "Then I answered the appeal in one way; now I have to answer it in another."

"In another!" The words ran from mouth to mouth. There was a hush of breathless anxiety and expectation. Lady Deveril's face grew pale and full of consternation. Even Lady Constance Arklow, follower though she was of Masterson, wrinkled up her brows in a disturbed manner. The editor tried to look unconcerned. Father St. Maurice looked deeply interested. The man who made speeches on universal disarmament smiled benignly. Perhaps with that exception, in spite of all acknowledged principles, there was not a person present who had not in his or her heart hoped that Morse would seize the opportunity made for him. All had expected some sort of diplomatic avowal of a change of front on the part of the Radical leader—reference to new elements set in motion by the elections; the altered aspect of the situation; the true statesmanlike duty of yielding to the wish of a people constitutionally expressed, an allusion to Lord Palmerston's change of attitude, or Mr. Gladstone's, or somebody's, as a precedent and justification for a like proceeding on the part of a statesman now.

"At that time," Morse continued, "I had to say that I was about to become a member of an Administration then being formed. Now I have to say that I have no such intention. I hope the club will not be sorry to hear that I continue to be one of its members. As things now stand, it is absolutely impossible that I could take any part in the government of this country. I believe, and I say it with the

deepest regret, that no Ministry could stand just now which did not yield to the demand for war; and I will not yield to that demand. Nothing on earth shall change my resolve; and therefore I am glad," he said, with a smile, "to be able to announce that I shall continue to be a member of the Progressive Club."

The advocate of peace jumped from his chair, ran round to Morse, and literally embraced him, and then burst into tears of sincere delight—the tears of the enthusiast.

But a shadow fell upon the soul of Lord Albert Folger, and the face of Mr. Sinclair was dark. Mr. Cutts gasped several times, but could find nothing to say. His astonishment beggared words.

"He may be wrong in his decision," St. Maurice said; "but he is—a man."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"BUT MY CHILDREN?"

THE newspapers came out the morning after Morse's explanation at the Progressive Club without a word or hint of the news. To be sure, Lord Albert Folger, who was great on giving straight tips to his favourite journals generally, had gone direct to the Sunday evening meeting of the Universe Club, but then he had taken care not to let the story get out there. He still thought it well to cling to Morse's fortunes; and he was not without a hope that Morse might even yet be led to reconsider his determination. To Lord Albert it seemed well-nigh impossible that a man so near the summit of an Englishman's ambition should thus clip Elysium and lack his joy on a mere scruple about a war. The less said, therefore, for the present about Morse's resolve the better. Morse must not be committed too soon; and so Lord Albert kept his news to himself. The news had dashed him, but he was not yet in despair, or even quite despondent.

"Queen sent for Morse yet, Folger?" Colonel Merriman asked, with an air of marvellously artificial ease and carelessness. Colonel Merriman was supposed to be a contributor to a morning paper, and was always on the look-out for straight tips.

"Not yet," was Lord Albert's answer, given in a mysterious whisper and with a diplomatic glance around, as if to see if any one was watching them.

"But she will, of course?"

"My dear Merriman, she hasn't told *me* anything about it. She hasn't sent for *me*."

"I see, I see." And Colonel Merriman went off, satisfied that Lord Albert knew all about it, and was only making a confounded mystery of what might as well be told first as last. So he went down to his newspaper office and imparted the news that it was all right about Morse. No other member of the Progressive Club went anywhere but

to his home after the proceedings at the dinner had come to an end, and thus it happened that London learned nothing next morning about the determination of the Radical leader not to take office, and not to tolerate a policy of war.

As the day wore on the news began to get about. Some of the members of the Progressive Club telegraphed the story early in the morning to friends and constituents in the country, and so it happened that it got into the second editions of some provincial papers before it was announced in any London journal. The London evening papers, in fact, gave it currency only on the faith of a telegram from some provincial correspondents, and guarded themselves against guaranteeing its accuracy on the ground that there was not time to make inquiry in what was called "the proper quarter."

It is needless to say that the news did not quickly reach Kooràli's ears. But it would not have been news to her in any case. From what people told her, and from what she could read in the newspapers, it was evident that the voice of the majority was for war, and she well knew that to such a demand Morse would not yield. She knew her hero, she thought; and she was proud of him; proud, in advance, of his resolve. She was proud of having been sometimes admitted to his confidence; proud of having been allowed, though even only once or twice and by glimpses, to look into his heart; proud to have been in sympathy, to be still in sympathy with him. "He will forget me in all this," she sometimes thought. "So much the better," she told herself.

Crichton came back to London late that evening. He was in a state of irritation and repressed excitement. He had heard a rumour that Morse had announced his intentions at the dinner of the Progressive Club. He had heard the disturbing rumour in the hunting-field, and he had come up to town after a long, unsatisfactory day on purpose to see what truth there was in it.

Kooràli had finished her lonely dinner, and was lingering over the dining-room fire reading a morning paper in which there was a leading article about Morse. She was thinking, with an ache at her heart, of Morse and of Lady Betty.

Crichton came in like a gust of harsh wind from outside. He met Kooràli's regrets about the poor preparation for any tolerable dinner with a gesture of impatience.

"Oh, never mind. I ought to have telegraphed. Anything will do. It was a beastly day's hunting; no scent. I hear Morse is in town. Have you seen him to-day?"

"No," replied Kooràli.

Crichton looked at her keenly, but asked no further questions. He read his letters, and began to eat his hastily prepared dinner. "Well," he said, "there seems to be nothing but bad news and duns."

"What bad news?" asked Kooràli vacantly. She was always hearing bad news.

"Oh, Clumper wants money, and Bonhote writes that he won't

come to dinner. What the deuce is this flavoured with? Ask the cook if she has nothing better for me to eat than stuff like this?"

The servant went out. Kooràli inquired if Crichton had seen Zen.

"Zen is making a fool of herself over her village entertainments and poor men's club. Every one can see that Arden, not philanthropy, is at the bottom of it all. What an idiot she is to think that Arden could be taken by a woman like her! Eustace and she have fallen out, and he has gone over to Paris by himself."

Kooràli would have liked to know more, but Crichton was absorbed in the cook's new concoction, and was in a gruff, uncommunicative mood. When he had finished he got up, not lingering as was his wont over the wine.

"I'm going to the club," he said, "just to hear the news. Don't go to bed till I come back. I shan't be long. And I want to talk to you. It's time we knew what we were about."

Kooràli understood his ways, and knew quite well that he had heard something or suspected something which he did not choose to tell her as yet. It was something disagreeable to him, that was plain, and at the same time something in which he supposed her to be directly or indirectly concerned; something for which she was to receive blame. About that she was quite clear. It occurred to her now and then, in a dismally humorous way, that Crichton would be disappointed sometimes if anything in which she was concerned went quite well, and left him no excuse for finding fault with her. So much of self-sacrifice is there left, even in the very selfish, that many a man would positively rather things went wrong and gave him a chance of scolding his wife, than that they went right and afforded him no such opportunity. This is a fact whereon a certain school of thinkers, who believe that man is concerned only for his practical personal interests, would do well to ponder deeply. For, after all, it surely cannot be but that there are men who would rather forfeit some personal advantage than imperil a great cause, seeing that there are undoubtedly men who would now and then willingly sacrifice a personal comfort or acquisition for the sake of being able to grumble at their wives, and say, "I told you so; you ought to have done this; you ought not to have done that; it was all your fault; you never will be persuaded to follow my advice and my instructions."

Kooràli sat thinking of such things in a half-satirical, half-melancholy mood. It is a trial for a wife to be misprized by the one who should most appreciate her; but how much harder a trial, a temptation, to be misprized by that one and only too highly prized by some other? Kooràli looked into the embers of the fire as she sat and thought; and there she seemed to see her early Australian life pass like a moving picture before her. She saw her youth, her hopes; she saw the grey dawn and Morse; and the fire collapsed with a little crash, and Kooràli gave an audible sob. She roused herself up, ashamed of her moment of weakness, and she went to the window

and tried to look out upon the night. Suddenly the postman's ring sounded. The letter which was handed to Kooràli bore the South Britain stamp. It was in Mr. Middlemist's handwriting, and it had a deep mourning border.

Who was dead? Kooràli wondered at first, in a dazed apathetic way. She did not feel any thrill of terror. Everything seemed to matter little now. After a few moments, she suddenly came to know by a sort of instinct, even before she had read the flimsy pages, that it was her stepmother who had died. Mr. Middlemist wrote forlornly. For the third time he was alone. The better and tenderer nature of the man shone out under the influence of grief. Kooràli was deeply touched. There was something pathetic in the appeal to her which the letter conveyed; in the hinted remorse for past neglect. Hers was a sympathy which took fire readily. Mr. Middlemist suggested that he might find consolation for his declining years in the companionship of his only daughter and his grandsons. He wished it were possible for them to make his home theirs. He wrote in the full belief that Crichton, having lost his appointment, would shortly return to South Britain. He had heard nothing of Crichton's ambitious schemes.

Kooràli sat for a long time over the fire in the drawing-room, with the letter in her hand. A wild palpitating hope rose within her like that which might be felt by some storm-tossed seaman who fancies that he sees land upon the horizon. Oh, if Crichton would but allow her to go back again to her father, to take her boys to South Britain, and bring them up there to work for themselves, to be brave, manly, self-reliant!

Kooràli told herself that she no longer craved for joy in life. She had outgrown her time; she had outworn her illusions. There was nothing left for her but duty. Her spirits and nerves were broken, and she only asked for rest. She honestly wished to escape from all chance of meeting Morse, and from that terribly false position which made her home-life so difficult. She had put aside her dream of love as one bound to the working-day world must turn perforce from visions of an impossible heaven on earth. She feared for her strength to bear against the hourly fret of her chains, the constant oppression of that misfortune which had befallen her. She saw herself, as years went on, hardened, hopeless, querulous, perhaps ungracious to her children, deteriorated in moral fibre. For was it not inevitable that her standard should become lowered? Must she not in time sink to Crichton's level, lower herself for very peace sake, and lose touch of high and noble purpose? Could there be any worse wrong? Oh, where was the right, and where the wrong?

Kooràli pressed her hand over her eyes. Her brain was deadened. Her obligation seemed narrowed down to a measure of maternal duty, and beyond that there was no horizon. This crave for liberty, to live alone with her children, was possessing her. It consumed her like a passion. She felt that she could not endure these daily hypocrisies—

could not live in conventional intercourse with Morse and Lady Betty, conscious all the time of that degrading half-understanding between herself and her husband.

She was still sitting with her forehead bent down upon her hands, when Crichton returned. He came in boisterously, and she gave a great start and rose in a frightened way from her chair as he closed the door behind him and approached her. She had let her thoughts go wandering away to Muttabarra, to the Pilot Station, to that lone stretch of Australian coast which she saw as distinctly as though she were looking at a picture. Crichton's entrance was like the renewed pressure of an incubus that had been thrown off for a little while. After breathing free air, she seemed again stifled.

"Your friend Morse has ruined the finest chances a man ever had in his hands," Kenway exclaimed fiercely, without any preliminary explanation. "He has flung away," he added with a furious oath, "the fortunes of a whole party. He will never recover this; he's gone; he's ruined—and, confound him, he has ruined me too!"

Kooràli drew a deep breath; but she did not at once realize what he meant; she was not seriously discomposed. Crichton Kenway, in a fit of anger, was to her a tolerably familiar spectacle; and his fits of anger might as well be about trifles as about serious things. The ruin of a party or the overdoing of a steak—what did it matter?

"What has happened?" she asked.

"Don't play the innocent. Hasn't he told you?"

"As I said before, I have not seen Mr. Morse to-day—or for many days."

"But didn't he prepare you for this? Doesn't he write to you? Oh, I know! Come, out with it. Did he not tell you; didn't he ask your philosophical and virtuous advice? Are you not his Egeria and I don't know what all? Do you mean to tell me that you really know nothing of all this? By God, I don't believe you!"

Kooràli looked at him with more serious questioning. He had come close to her, and she shrank from him, not because of fear so much as because of repugnance. There was a repressed fury in Crichton's eyes and tone which did almost frighten her, in spite of the contempt for his tragic moods which experience had taught her.

"You see, Crichton, you have not given me a chance of knowing whether Mr. Morse did consult me or didn't," she said, in that cold clear voice which had the double effect of outwardly calming and inwardly incensing her husband. "I have no idea of what you are speaking. Will you tell me first? You can be angry with me after—or disbelieve me."

Crichton glared at her savagely. But he gulped down his wrath somehow, and sat himself to explain in short, curt sentences.

"Morse has refused to form a Ministry. He gave it out last night at the Progressive Club. All London is talking of it. There's not a doubt that we shall have war—more aggressions are telegraphed in the papers this evening. A Cabinet council is called. Not an English-

man with the spirit of a mouse but will stand up for war, and Morse sticks to his cowardly, pig-headed obstinacy."

"Oh, that is all," Kooràli said quietly; but she reared her little frame with a gesture that implied she was on the defensive. "Yes, Crichton, I knew he would do that; he told me. But he also told you and many other people, didn't he? I heard him say it the very first day we ever dined at Lady Betty's. He spoke then so strongly against the idea of a war that, of course, I knew he would have nothing to do with it. He has been denouncing it, working hard against it ever since; and he always told me he did not think it would be possible for any man to form a Government now who set himself against the war."

"Stuff! Things hadn't gone so far then. That was before the elections; before he had the chance of being Prime Minister. Public men always say that sort of thing when they are not in power. No one expects them to keep to it when they get the chance of office."

"Then did you really believe Mr. Morse was a man who cared about office, or would sacrifice his own convictions and principles to it? For a man of the world, Crichton, I don't think you read men's character very well. I have not spoken much to Mr. Morse lately about this, but of course I knew that he would not take office, if taking office were to mean carrying on this war."

"A man owes something to his party," Kenway said sulkily.

"A man owes something to his principles and to himself; and Mr. Morse is a man to pay his debts of honour of that kind," answered Kooràli steadily. "Crichton, I am glad; yes—I *am* glad—and I will say it; but I am not surprised."

"Perhaps it might throw a little damp on the fire of your joy," Kenway said angrily, "if you knew that your heroic friend's virtuous resolve is the ruin of your husband." And Crichton sat down with a look of despair. Indeed, there was unmistakable sincerity in that look. Kooràli was touched and alarmed by it.

"Crichton, do tell me," she said, coming up to him and laying a kindly hand upon his shoulder. "Has any fresh thing happened; and why is this your ruin? Our affairs are in a better state now than they were three months ago, when I begged you to accept the appointment Lord Coulmont offered."

Kooràli had almost become accustomed to hearing of their ruin, finding that nothing in particular came of it but that matters went on very much the same as before. She did not know the real depth of Crichton's embarrassments, and believed that, thanks to old Mrs. Nevile-Beauchamp's legacy, this crisis, like others, had been tided over. She did not realize either how rooted was Crichton's determination to carve out a career for himself in England.

"Where am I to get an appointment now? Whom have I to look to?" cried Crichton, in a sort of angry wail. "I pinned my faith on him altogether; I put all my eggs in one basket; I have made enemies everywhere by sticking to him; I have publicly committed myself to

his policy; and now he throws me over! I have gone into debt; I have been raising money here, there, and everywhere, on the certainty of his getting me a permanent appointment; and now where am I? He has thrown me over; ruined me; ruined me!" Kenway jumped up again, and began pacing wildly up and down the room.

"But Crichton, Crichton," said Kooràli, her instinct of sympathy turned back again, "you surely could not expect Mr. Morse to carry on a war which he believes to be wicked merely to enable him to get appointments for his friends? I am very, very sorry; but I am sure I would rather starve than think of any man making such a sacrifice of principle."

"Starve! Oh, *you* won't starve; he won't let you starve; you will be right enough," Kenway said brutally. His words hurt Kooràli as the stroke of a whip might have done. She flushed for an instant, and then she turned very white; but she was determined to keep her self-control, and not to give her infuriated husband any excuse for insulting her. She did not reply for a few moments. When she answered, it annoyed him that she completely ignored his remark.

"You have many friends, Crichton; and you have talents. You cannot want the means and opportunities of making a living in a place like London; and there is always the alternative of going back to South Britain."

"That might suit you. It would only be going back to what you sprang from. But I've had rather too strong a dose of South Britain. I should be a happier man if I had never set foot in South Britain." His look, fixed on her, pointed the allusion.

A passionate entreaty rose to her lips—"Let me go back, then, to what I sprang from, and let us be free of each other;" but she did not utter it. She was determined to say nothing unguarded or impetuous. The proposal which was shaping itself in her mind must be made calmly and reasonably. Her only chance of having it accepted would lie, she knew, in its appeal to Crichton's self-interest. He might think it better for himself to be rid of her and her children. No; he would never let Lance go. He might give her Miles. Would he give her Miles? Could she leave Lance? The questions and answers balanced each other in her mind, repeating themselves over and over again, so that she hardly heard Crichton as he went on—

"Make a living for myself! Yes; I dare say. I can write for the newspapers. I can do penny-a-lining perhaps. That isn't quite the sort of thing I wanted. I wanted to be a gentleman, and to be able to live like one. Fancy how my confounded family will laugh when they hear of all this! I don't wonder, I am sure. I have been making a confounded fool of myself, trusting to that man—yes; and to you. Do you hear?"

Kooràli started, recalled from that bewildering process of weighing possibilities. "Do you really believe," she said coldly, "that Mr. Morse would have taken office if I had advised him; if I had been mean and false enough to advise him? Do you think he is a man to

be put into leading-strings in that way by any woman? Do you think his wife did not urge him enough to put himself on the side of the Court and of her class?"

"A man doesn't care about his wife's advice," Kenway said coarsely. "It's quite a different thing about the advice of another man's wife." He laughed cynically.

"He wouldn't have taken my advice to that effect," she said; "and I would not have given him such advice."

There was a little silence. She half expected that Crichton would refer back to their last conversation on the subject, in Zen's house—the conversation which was burnt for ever into her memory. He had forgotten it apparently, and had taken her indignant protests as meaning nothing. He had gone on believing that he could still make use of her as a bait, even after that appeal to him which it had cost her so much to make. Her breast heaved with the sense of utter loneliness. But she held herself in, and after a moment caught at this want of comprehension of her as a plea for superficial dealing. She went on in a frozen way—

"You rather overrate Mr. Morse's opinion of my intellect and my capacity for advising statesmen, Crichton."

"I wasn't saying anything about your intellect, Kooràli. Perhaps, if it comes to that, I have no mighty high opinion of it myself. It isn't by their intellect that women govern men. Look at Lady Maud and Lord Paddington. She hasn't very much intellect; she has hardly a trace of good looks left; she is twenty years older than you; and she can turn him round her finger! By Jove, I wish I knew her. She would be more use to me than you are."

"I wish you did know her, Crichton; I can be of no use to you in the way of obtaining appointments. It might have spared you disappointment if you had believed me in earnest when I said this before. I think it is cruel and shameful of you to speak in that way." Her determination not to see that she was insulted began to break down.

"You know what I mean, perfectly well," he said. "You know I don't mean anything wrong. You know I would cut your throat if I thought you were capable of anything wrong. But I don't; luckily for you. That isn't your line. By Jove, you haven't feeling enough for it, I verily believe. But there is influence which a wife, who is anything of a decent 'pal' to her husband, may fairly use for his advantage, without giving occasion for the slightest whisper or breath of scandal. Well, you didn't use it anyhow. After all, I don't suppose you really had any influence over Morse. I suppose he meant nothing all the time." Crichton laughed jeeringly. "After all, that is more likely than that the Farnesia business was a plant to get me out of the way. You were quite right, I did give you credit for too much cleverness."

"Mr. Morse is a gentleman, and a man of honour," Kooràli said in her quietest tone. She was recovering her self-possession. She despised the man too much to feel the sting of his senseless insults.

She was only anxious now to bring this odious scene to a close as soon as possible.

"I don't call it the part of a gentleman, and a man of honour, to turn the prospects of the party and the friends who trusted him for a more absurd scruple. No honour others may be trained, but I can see whether two can't play at that game of scruples. I may have my chance of revenge on your head yet! scrupulous friend, Koorâli, and see if I don't make good use of it, that's all. You fool! you confirmed Morse may find out in his own some day that there are two women he has injured and who can repay."

Koorâli did not at the moment pay much attention to these words of her husband's. It did not seem possible to her that he could have any real purpose or means of revenge on Morse. It was a common thing with him to vaticinate himself into very wrong by-ways of mind and mysterious schemes of vengeance, and Koorâli had always seen that the commonest men and women lived long. Probably Kennedy saw the meaning of her expression.

"You think I am in earnest," he said, with a fierce laugh; "but you wait and see. I can hit your friend Morse where he will feel it. You shall see before long. Meanwhile as I was not to entertain you, you wouldn't help me, and you could see with me, I can do. Let Morse so if you like, when you confab with him next."

"May I go now?" Koorâli asked. "Do you want me any more?"

"You may go," he answered fiercely. "Attend your pleasure. The further the better." Then he turned to leave the room. He stopped at the door, and said, "I am going out again, and I am off by an early train to-morrow. If anything turns up that I could to know, or any one wants to see me that I ought to see, you can bring him to me at the Grey Manor."

It was curious that, with all his unmeaning words, Koorâli knew her husband thoroughly. Crichton Kennedy assumed and knew perfectly well that she would look after his interests faithfully and obey all his reasonable commands. He knew that in spite of his ill-treatment, even though he meant her real harm after leaving the Residency, she would not betray him. He had no more doubt of her absolute purity than he had of her bodily existence. But he had a keen idea that she might, as she had the craft of other women, have managed to secure something for him without any sacrifice of, at all events, her good name. Probably he spoke truly enough; probably he would have found that it he believed in even suspected that she had done wrong, her, all the same, he did not see why she might not have managed to be something for her husband without being wrong to herself. In any case he was not well satisfied with Morse, and he knew no better way of expressing his fury than to pour it out on her.

As he was going away Koorâli's voice stopped him.

"Crichton."

He turned again, and looked her. She had come forward to the centre of the room, and stood very pale and resolute, with tears

clasped nervously before her, and bright dilated eyes which met his with a sort of steely hardness.

"Well!" he asked impatiently. "What are you looking at me like that for? Have you anything else to say? Make haste, it is getting late."

"I shall not keep you many minutes," said Kooràli, with intense quietness. "I have something to say to you, Crichton, which I want you to take seriously. I mean it with my whole heart. It is a plan—a proposal. I think it might relieve you from difficulty."

"Well!" he repeated. "You are not usually fertile in suggestions about getting me out of my difficulties. Let me hear this one."

"You said just now that I might go away—where I pleased—the farther the better. Did you really mean that, Crichton?"

"Oh, confound it all," said he roughly, "don't begin talking in the air. I'm married to you, I suppose, and I must support you; and there's an end of it."

"There may be an end of it," she said, still with that extreme quietude; "and you may be relieved from the burden of supporting me, if only you will agree to what I ask. Will you let me go away, Crichton, and live apart from you? Why should we keep up this mockery of a union? It seems to me a most frightful and unnatural thing that two people should be bound together for life who feel as you and I feel. I think you must almost hate me, Crichton, or you could not speak to me and think of me as you do; and I have neither love nor respect left now for you. It seems a hard thing to say; but it is the truth. Will you let me go away? I don't want you to give me any money. I want nothing but——" and she stopped suddenly, for she dared not add, "my children," lest before he had time to consider the advantages of being rid of her, he might silence her pleading by an angry refusal.

"Be good enough to talk common sense," he exclaimed. "What do you propose to do after you have gone?—work or starve?"

"I will go back to South Britain," she answered.

"And when you have got back—I suppose you have considered that your passage will have to be paid?—do you intend to ask your stepmother's permission to make a home with her? You were glad enough to be out of your father's house, and he was glad enough to get you off his hands. I shouldn't think he'd be so delighted to take you on again."

"My stepmother is dead," said Kooràli. "Just before you came in, Crichton, I had been thinking of this—longing that I might go away. I have got a letter from my father"—she made a little gesture towards the written sheets which lay upon the hearth-rug near where she had been sitting—"he tells me of his sorrow and his loneliness, and he wishes that I might be with him again—I and my children."

"*Your* children!" cried Crichton savagely. "Are they not my children too? And do you think I'm going to let my boys—let Lance—be brought up after the pattern of Mr. Middlemist?"

Kooràli nervously unclasped her hands, and then laced the fingers again more tightly. Her large dark eyes, full of anxiety and earnestness, never left his face; her heart was throbbing in great hammer-beats. It was as though her life—more than life to her—was at stake.

"Crichton," she said, "let us speak of this matter in a gentle spirit. There's no use in saying taunting things. The children are yours as well as mine. That is the most pitiful and terrible fact in such a marriage as ours. You have a part right to them——"

He interrupted her. "Let me remind you," he said, "that Lance is just eight years old. Miles will be seven in a month or two. The law gives me full right."

"Is there a mother in England who would acknowledge it?" cried Kooràli passionately. "What is your right compared with mine? I bore them—I love them. They are all the world to me, and they love me—my poor little boys!" Kooràli's voice broke. After a moment she went on more steadily. "I don't want to be unfair, Crichton, or to dispute that you have a right; but you don't care about the children as I do. They are only playthings to you—hardly that, for you are often impatient even with Lance, though I know you are fond of him."

She waited as if for him to speak, but he kept a sullen silence.

"Haven't you anything to say to me about our living apart, Crichton?" she asked tremulously. "Surely that would please you better than the miserable life we lead now! Indeed, I do not think I *could* live it for much longer; it would kill me."

She waited once more. "Go on," he said again, "I want to hear all that you have got to say."

"Think of it, Crichton," she went on, her voice gaining intensity, "think of what it has come to after all these years—that I long—that I pray to be released from you. Doesn't that speak for itself? It doesn't matter whose fault it is, or why it is. That's enough. We weren't suited to each other, and now we are hopelessly divided in heart and soul. I'm not excusing myself, Crichton, or putting all the blame on you. I think a different sort of woman might have been happier with you; but there's the fact, and it's best that we should part. Don't let us quarrel, Crichton. Let me go in peace."

"Look here," exclaimed Crichton furiously. "There's no use talking in this way. I'll not consent to any scandal in my family; we are not used to it. If you go, it's on your own responsibility; and you don't come back again. Mind one thing," he added, coming closer to her, "if you do go, you don't take the children. I hold to that. You don't take the children."

"Can you be so cruel, so pitiless?"

"Don't you know me even yet? You shall see."

"Do you think you are the man to bring up children well; to teach my boys how to be men of honour—and gentlemen," exclaimed Kooràli desperately.

"What do you know about gentlemen? There weren't any gentle-

men in your family, were there? I never heard it insinuated that old Middlemist was a gentleman."

"Will you let me take my boys, Crichton, my sweet little innocent boys, who love me? You don't care about them; you don't care about children. Miles is so delicate, and Lance is very young still, and you want to get your affairs straight and to live in London. You would be glad—surely you would be glad not to have the trouble of them—and of me. Oh, Crichton, if I might keep them, say—for even three years, and then I would be reasonable. I would not ask for more than was just. They would go to school, and we might agree to share them. They might come to me at one time, and go to you at another; or you might let me have Miles altogether—oh, Crichton!"

She broke down now. The tears were gushing from her eyes. Kenway was glad. He believed that he had conquered.

"You've had my answer. It's no! Nothing will alter me. I'll leave you now to think things over," he said. "You know the conditions exactly. Go if you like, and when you like; but when you close the door of my house behind you, you have no more to do with my children—you shall never see them again."

He went out of the room, and shut the door behind him with a clang. Perhaps he was making the sound a sort of suggestion to her of the crash that would come upon her life and her affections when the door of his house should close behind her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WINTER SESSION.

Parliament was called together for a winter session. There were troubles in the air; the fierce breath of a coming storm was felt. The Ministry had perforce to remain in office, as Morse would not come in, and just then no one else could. But they could not venture to get on without calling Parliament together and obtaining its authority. The great question was that of war or peace. At first, the only loud outcry was for war. Numbers of Englishmen everywhere were sick of being told that England could not fight any more, except with unarmed savages; and they would have welcomed a war with any great power, for any purpose, or for no purpose. The Ministry in possession felt that nothing would strengthen their position so much as a popular war, and at first it seemed as if this war would be altogether popular; but, after a while, an anti-war party began to make its existence known, and it grew more and more powerful every day. Perhaps the Ministry began to wish now that they had not called Parliament together that winter, but had acted boldly for themselves; had gone into the war at once and asked for the consent of Parliament afterwards. In no case had they any doubt of a great parliamentary majority for a war policy; but they feared the stirring-up of angry

feeling, and the possibility of inconvenient popular demonstrations on either side in the large towns, and perhaps consequent disturbance. However, the thing was done now and could not be undone. Parliament was called together and everybody came back to town, and a winter season set in with the winter session. Wives and daughters in general liked it.

It was a tumultuous time. Public passion was fierce on both sides. The advocates of war were clamorous, and denounced all who opposed them as traitors, enemies to their country, and craven slaves of the foreigner. On the other hand, the opponents of the war had on their side the vast majority of the working-men almost everywhere. The prospect of work and wages for the winter was bad, and the artisan population were wild at the thought of the country's money being squandered at such a time in what they believed to be an idle and wicked war. It got reported, nobody knew why, that the Court favoured the war, and were pressing Ministers on to throw down the gauntlet at once, and this further stimulated passion on both sides. Every evening great crowds gathered around the House of Commons cheering this or that member, according as he favoured their notions, and groaning at others. A large number of the street-lounging class were in favour of the war; so were nearly all the smaller shopkeepers; and in all sections of London life there is a good deal of sympathy with what its enemies call the "Jingo" feeling. Therefore the crowd round the Houses of Parliament was usually pretty well divided in strength, and the conspicuous member who got cheered by one set was sure to get groaned at by another. It was found necessary sometimes to close all the great gates, and Palace Yard was literally garrisoned by police. Every evening it was expected that the Ministry would announce the withdrawal of our ambassador and the declaration of war. The tension on both sides was unexampled in its severity. London seemed to hold its breath.

Morse was always greeted with a peculiarly impassioned demonstration from both sides. If a spectator standing on the far edge of a crowd, the eastern verge of it, were to hear a tremendous burst of cheering again and again renewed, and suddenly broken in upon and divided by a very thunderstorm of groans, hisses, and ferocious yells of hate, he might take it for granted that Sandham Morse was making his way into the House. Morse had been addressing meeting after meeting in London and in the provinces to condemn and denounce the war policy. He had flung himself into the anti-war movement with characteristic energy, and nothing but the popular force which he brought together, organized, and concentrated, prevented the Ministry from yielding to the clamour of the other side and declaring war at once. Morse was accepted by every one as the head and front of the anti-war party, which the working populations of all the great towns regarded as their own party.

Masterson was very active with his democrats; but Morse kept aloof from any close association with that part of the agitation. We have

already shown that he did not much believe in cosmopolitan associations. He did not care much about the "solidarity of nations" and other such phrases; he did not care about fine phrases in general. He did not see how, as things now stand, there could be any real unity of feeling and aim between continental democracy and the democracy of this country. But he had an especial reason for holding himself apart from Masterson's people. He had a strong suspicion concerning certain of the foreign confederates. Those of them who belonged to the country with which England was in all probability actually going to war seemed to him especially undesirable associates. He did not like the men personally; he did not trust them; he warned Masterson against them repeatedly and emphatically. Even if they were perfectly honest, he did not think their presence becoming in an English meeting. "We don't understand fellows acting against their own country; our people can't make it out," he told Masterson. Masterson extolled the noble love of humanity which set men above paltry considerations of nationality, and made them the brothers of all other men the world over, and bluntly told Morse that he was spoiled and made narrow and distrustful by the mean life of the House of Commons. Then Morse told Masterson, and wrote it to him several times, in order, if possible, to impress him the more, that he did not trust the men themselves; that he believed they were nothing more or less than spies for some sinister purpose.

A great meeting was to take place in Hyde Park, from which a monster procession was to march to Palace Yard, and Morse at first was consenting to be present at the meeting; but he found that these very men were to be prominent in it, and Masterson would not give them up; and Morse therefore wrote to say he would not go, and told Masterson his reasons. Then Masterson grew cold towards Morse, and talked sadly and with many shakings of the head about the corrupting influence of Parliament and the West End upon even the finest characters; and it was plain that he regarded Morse as "a good man gone wrong."

"Her Majesty the Queen has been pleased to confer on Mr. Crichton Kenway, late Agent-General for South Britain, the appointment of Governor of the Farnesia Islands."

So ran the paragraph in one of the morning papers, by which the defeat of Crichton Kenway's dearest hopes was announced to the world in general. A paragraph in a social weekly enlarged somewhat on the information, gave particulars of Kenway's career, praised his abilities and qualification for a colonial governorship, touched enthusiastically upon the charms of his wife, and deplored the removal of so bright a star from the firmament of London society. Another paragraph, however, in a paper the pens of whose writers were tipped with gall, questioned the superior claim of Mr. Crichton Kenway to be provided for at the country's expense, and offered dark suggestions as to the motive for this appointment on the part of an almost moribund Govern-

ment, supposed to have now no privileges beyond the creation of a batch of peers. The writer intimated that the appointment was due to the private intervention of a certain eminent Radical statesman, and hinted that, though the statesman referred to was doubtless actuated by the most commendable unselfishness, he would feel the loss of an Egeria whose republican sentiments harmonized so entirely with his own political views.

Lady Betty read this paragraph in the little interval of quiet between the departure of her afternoon visitors and dressing time. For the moment it did not strike her that her husband was the statesman in question. When it did dawn upon her, she gave a little cry, half amused, half vexed, and glanced at Morse, who was standing with his back against the chimney-piece, and with the troubled expression which had become now so habitual on his face. He looked down at her in surprise.

"What is it, Betty? Are the Jingoes still raging furiously against me? What is the last accusation? That I am in league with the dynamiters? or that I am plotting the surrender of our Indian empire? I know that it all hurts you, child; but you are silly to mind it."

Lady Betty's lip trembled, and she exclaimed with a sort of childlike burst of feeling—

"How can I help minding it, Sandham? How can I help being made unhappy by these horrible reports? For you won't take them—or me—seriously. You only laugh in that hard cynical way; and you won't authorize me to contradict them, even to my own father—or the Princess!"

A gleam shot from Morse's eyes, and his face hardened as it had a way of doing when he was moved and yet determined not to break his self-restraint. He answered in a level tone—

"At any rate, exonerate yourself from complicity, Betty. Assure your father—and the Princess, or as many princesses as you please—that you are quite in the dark, and that I have refused to authorize even my own wife to contradict these reports."

Lady Betty looked at him doubtfully, and then straightened herself with a little air of dignity.

"Ah, now you are angry with me, Sandham; and, indeed, you are not just. Isn't it natural that I should wish to take my husband's part when all the world is abusing him? Isn't it natural that I should want the Royal Family, who have always been so nice to me, to think as well of you as they can, and as little seriously as possible of the dreadful republican speeches you make, and of your opposition to their wishes and ideas about what is best for England? Surely I'm not to be blamed for trying to smooth things over with my father? He is such a strong Tory and Royalist, don't you know, and he is bitter against you, Sandham, and ready to believe anything? You don't understand my position," Lady Betty went on, more plaintively. "You don't see how hard it is for me. You don't know how I feel going out this evening without you to meet the Prince and Princess.

And then to know that it is because you have made yourself so unpopular, and that people don't like to have you at their dinner-parties because your being there might cause embarrassment or even ill feeling. I don't think you try to realize, Sandham, how terrible it all is for me!"

Morse smiled grimly, and yet his heart melted towards his wife—poor tropical flower, which was so sweet, fragrant, and brilliant in the sunshine of prosperity, but which could not hold up its head before a wintry blast.

Lord Gemilion was giving a dinner-party to-night, at which Royalty was to be entertained. Lady Betty had been asked to preside; but Morse had received a hint that in the present state of political feeling, when the relations between parties were so strained, his presence might be distasteful to the illustrious guests. Morse had accepted the intimation with dignity, and the subject had not been discussed between his wife and himself, but there was bitterness in his heart.

"I'm sorry for you, Betty," he said, "sorry for your sake that your position to-night may not be as pleasant as when you entertained your Royal friends in this house, but so many months ago. There was an alternative, dear, however, which did not seem to occur to you—and I'm almost glad it did not."

"What was that, Sandham? Refusing to go myself? Yes, of course, I thought of that; but it would never have done. The Prince and Princess might have fancied—— And, then, we owe a great deal to my father, Sandham. He was very, very much annoyed when I made the suggestion. You see, I take my place there rather as his daughter than——" He thought that even from the tactical point of view it would be a mistake. "You know, Sandham, I have always relied very much on my father's judgment."

"Anyhow, the point needn't be discussed," said Morse a little impatiently. "I'm glad on the whole that you followed your own instincts, Betty. And so it's settled; and if the Royalties ask you whether it is true that I am plotting to overthrow them and to ruin England, you can only say that you did your best to find out, and that I wouldn't authorize you to contradict the statement." There was a little silence. Then he said, "But you haven't told me yet what 'Fashion' is saying about me."

Lady Betty's eyes were still fixed upon her husband with a wondering, pathetic expression. She was thinking to herself that he was hard to understand, and she recalled a warning given to her at the time of her marriage by an elderly relative, since dead, that in every a gulf lay between Morse and her. Then love had seemed to bridge the gulf completely, and she had laughed at the warning. Now it came back to her with a pang of passionate regret and self-pity. She knew that the bridge had given way, and that the gulf was there. Poor Lady Betty felt that of love everything had grown worn, and she could not rightly tell how or why. It was unreasonable to think that a mere difference in political opinion could hold apart so long two

hearts which truly loved each other. Lady Betty was not a woman of deep intuition, and she was not given to analysis; but it came upon her now that something subtler and stronger than politics lay at the root of their attitude towards each other. Six years ago they would have forgotten all their differences in an embrace. They would have talked over, hand in hand, any such question as that of Morse's presence or absence at one of Lord Germilion's ceremonious entertainments. It had not occurred to Lady Betty before that there had grown up a sort of formality even in their endearments. It all came into her mind now, and filled her with vague dread, mingled with uneasiness and faint resentment. She felt like a frightened child in a dark room, and she was angry at having been brought and left there. What did it mean? Was he tired of her? Had she disappointed him? How could that be? Did not people in high places—those among whom she had been trained in the duties of her station—compliment her upon her social eclecticism, her tact, her skill in bringing together the members of different parties? Had she not cultivated these qualities with the aim of furthering her husband's interests? Had she ever been other than sweet and gentle? Lady Betty could not reproach herself. She had a half-impulse to rise and go to him, and, leaning her head against him, ask him in the old caressing tone why he spoke so coldly and treated her with so little confidence. But pride held her back. With all her sweetness she was very proud. Hers was the pride of race, not that larger, nobler kind, which cannot ascribe a small motive, and which gives the full trust it demands. Then she saw with a swift jealous pang that he was not conscious she was looking at him. He was not thinking of her. His eyes were on the ground, and he seemed in a reverie. She made a little petulant gesture, and sank back in her chair. He looked up.

"Well, dear, what about my latest calumniator? What has he to say—or she?"

"It is only a paragraph about Mr. Kenway's appointment," said Lady Betty, hurriedly turning away her eyes again; "and there is an allusion to you in it—I suppose, Sandham, it is you they mean? You are the eminent Radical statesman—and Mrs. Kenway is your Egeria. I didn't think——"

Lady Betty stopped suddenly, and her hand faltered as she held out the paper towards her husband. Something struck her like the blow of a knife, and there passed through her a thrill of pain and anger. Was this the meaning of what had troubled her?

He bent eagerly forward to take the paper, and she saw a change come over his face which had seemed so hard and indifferent before. The change was but momentary; it might be likened to the play of lightning on a rock. In an instant the muscles of the mouth were tightened again, and the features once more set and resolute. But she had seen them quiver; she had seen the gleam of some sudden intense feeling in his eyes.

Lady Betty sat motionless while he read the paragraph. He put

the paper down again without a word. He knew that he had betrayed himself. Lady Betty's pride stood her in evil stead then. He made a little movement towards her; but she rose from her chair, and turned away. Her face had hardened too; it was white and cold. She would not look at him. A rush of the keenest self-reproach, of humiliation, almost of agony, flooded his heart.

"Betty!" he exclaimed.

But for his unhappy sensitiveness, which seemed to tell him that she would be ice in his arms, he would have taken her to him. It is the curse of such natures that in a moment of crisis some mere cross-current of emotion may turn the whole tide of feeling, and the rush of sympathy becomes as impossible as if it were checked by a dam of granite. Morse could not go to his wife and kiss her doubts away. Argument upon them, she would, he felt certain, consider an insult. He understood her pride. He knew that her manner of showing him that she doubted would be to ignore the cause of her doubts. To have it admitted that she—Lady Betty—had reason for jealousy would be a cruel stab. In that half-world of feeling, where thought and impulses are obstacles as real as any in the material world, Morse felt like a giant blindfolded and bound. He had in him the strength to clear a way, but he did not know where to turn, and could not lift his hands. He had a passionate longing to break free from restraints, to pluck away masks, and to face the situation; to stand his trial—the conventional here, the natural there, with cold, stern, passionless duty for the umpire. With all the sense of hopelessness, revolt, and impatience of shams, he had no desire to shirk his obligations. He felt nothing but tenderness and pity for his wife, intense sorrow for the division between them, remorse for the share, however slight and soon repented, he had had in its cause.

It was a strange moment, in which nothing was said or could be said, but in which so much was understood. Presently Lady Betty turned to him, her eyes not meeting his, and said in a studiously cold mechanical way—

"When do the Kenways leave London, Sandham? I must call on Mrs. Kenway and bid her good-bye."

"I think it will be soon," he answered, in something of the same manner. There was another short silence, exquisitely painful. Then he said, "You are always kind, Betty; and you have been very good to her."

"I wanted to make things nice for her," said poor Lady Betty. "I don't know quite where Farnesia is," she added, in a cold voice and with a sort of simulated interest; "and I suppose one ought to condole with Mrs. Kenway on having to leave England; but all those places have hot climates, and she was brought up in the tropics—isn't it? and must feel the cold, so I don't suppose she will mind the change so much—as I should. It's getting late, Sandham, I must go and dress."

She went towards the door. He opened it for her, and she passed through without looking at him.

The paragraph was right. It was through Morse's instrumentality that Crichton Kenway had again been allowed the opportunity of accepting or refusing the Farnesia appointment. Governorships are not things to go begging, and so Lord Coulmont had felt. But the Ministers were not averse to gratifying the wishes of an opponent by whose grace they remained in power. There is much revolving of wheels and pulling of strings even in minor political affairs.

After he had definitely announced his determination not to try and form a Ministry, Morse saw Crichton at his club, and told him that, though a post in the Colonial Office was out of the question, the chance of going to Farnesia was still open to him. Crichton dissembled his rage, but his manner gave Morse a new insight into the cause of poor Kooràli's unhappiness. Morse detected the false note in Crichton's somewhat effusive expressions. The savage gleam in his eye could not be hidden; and the man's whole demeanour made Morse think of a Syrian jackal he had once seen shaking with suppressed fury, but not daring to show his fangs. It gave Morse an uneasy feeling. For the moment he regretted the turn events had taken. Oh, that it had been possible for him to remain Kooràli's friend—to watch over her welfare in England! He cut short an artful digression of Kenway's which had for its object the gaining of some political information.

"We shall know nothing till the House meets. In the meantime you'll think over this suggestion and decide by to-morrow. In your own interest I should advise you to try Farnesia; it may lead to something better by-and-by."

He was moving off, anxious to close a distasteful conversation, but Kenway detained him. My answer might be given now, Mr. Morse, but perhaps I'd better talk it over with my wife. Anyhow you have my thanks—and my gratitude. I don't pretend that I shouldn't have preferred something else to Farnesia, but one can't always have what he prefers. Isn't it so?"

Kenway's malign furtive gaze dropped before Morse's quick glance.

"Yes. Life is a question of compromise. Good-bye."

"You are almost a stranger to us now," exclaimed Kenway. "How is that? Kooràli bade me ask what we have done that you so seldom come near us."

Morse knew well that Kooràli had sent no such message. A sickening feeling of disgust rose within him.

"The elections are my excuse," he said. "Please make my apologies to Mrs. Kenway. I shall do myself the pleasure of calling before long." He turned away, with a somewhat ceremonious gesture of leave-taking.

"Damn him!" muttered Kenway below his breath.

Morse did not call at the house yet, nor did he write to Kooràli about the impending change in her life. She was not consulted by her husband either. His manner to her since the scene in which she had begged for freedom had been gruff, distant, almost unbearable. He seemed to wish that she should understand once for all that he was

matter. She knew nothing of the affair till he told her, in no very agreeable manner, that he had decided to go to Fenosia, and that they would sail shortly after the meeting of Parliament. She made no protest. Was it not what she herself had urged?

She read the paragraph which had caught Lady Betty's attention, and her cheeks burned and her heart throbbed with pain. It was time that she went away.

The date was fixed now. Crichton was busy with his arrangements. The Grey Manor was let, and soon the London house would be let also. In the meantime, Crichton was taking advantage of his opportunities to get as much boating as he could, and, with a view to some distant future, cementing his interests in Lyndfordshire.

Kendall remained in London. She felt dreary and solitary. Her morning exercise was her only pleasure. She refused invitations. It seemed as if the star of the once-brilliant Mrs. Crichton Kenway had sunk below the horizon. She never saw Morse. It struck her sometimes as strange that Lady Betty did not ask her to luncheon or dinner as of old. Then she remembered the ghastly political prospects, and Lady Betty's uneasiness and alarm and horror of republican tendencies. Perhaps she was not giving luncheon and dinner parties now. Kendall could not help wondering, however, whether there could be any other cause for this cessation of intercourse.

One bright hour in Kendall's life about this time was scored by her visit to the house of Lord Forrest. The extreme of Lord Forrest's concession to the principle of social intercourse was his invitation of one or two ladies to luncheon, and he sent the ago his son such an invitation to Kendall. Lord Arden called for her and brought her to his father's house. There was at first something *schauderhaft* to Kendall's mind in the aspect of the large lonely house. It looked as the palace of Prince Beddini, in the Irish story, might have looked when the false and fair princess had deserted her home. But the sweet and gracious courtesy of the occupant soon dispelled this gloomy feeling. Only three sat to luncheon—Kendall, Lord Forrest, and Arden. Lord Forrest said to Kendall a petting and soothing manner. He seemed to be in sympathy with her—she could not quite understand how or why. His voice had a caressing tenderness about it, as if he was of opinion that she was somehow misprized, and that he wanted to try to make up to her for it. His manner breathed the spirit of the line in Goethe's immortal ballad: "Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?" "What have they done to you, you poor child?" How have they wronged you who ought to care for you? It was, perhaps, only Kendall's own sensitive and excited fancy which made her put this sort of interpretation on the chivalrous courtesy of an old man who would have been courteous and chivalric to a milkmaid; but she could not help believing that his way of receiving her and welcoming her betokened something of a special sympathy. In her present mood she was so much touched by it that she could hardly keep the tears from coming into her eyes now and then. She was always moved

more by kindness than by unkindness. Unkindness froze her; the touch of sympathy alone dissolved the congealed emotions of her bosom.

Lord Forrest showed her his pictures, his curiosities, his abundant family relics. There was something wondrously fascinating to the Australian woman in the unbroken connection of the past and the present which these family relics preserved and illustrated. One must be born of a new country in order quite to understand the feeling. The sword that had stricken at Agincourt; the crucifix that had been pressed to the dying lips of an ancestral Crusader on the plains of Sharon; the mailed glove that had rusted on Bosworth Field; the horse-pistol which had been last discharged at Naseby; the plume that had been drenched in the blood and mire of Culloden—such embodied memories as these made Kooràli's pulses tingle. Republican and democrat as she was she could not but see that there is a romantic, a picturesque, a poetic side to the theory of an aristocracy and an ancestry; and that what our forefathers have done for us we may, despite of Ovid's Ulysses, sometimes call our own.

"This is a great country," she suddenly said, with an involuntary burst of emotion; "one must see that."

"It was a great country," Lord Forrest said, "when it was a country with a principle."

"There are Englishmen with a principle now," Kooràli began in an excited way; and then she suddenly stopped. She thought she saw Lord Arden's eyes turn quickly on her.

"Heaven forbid that I should say no," Lord Forrest answered. "But they do not, such men, usually seek public life; or, if they do, they soon find that it does not understand them. But, my dear Mrs. Kenway, I don't mean to fatigue you with our politics here; I want you to tell me something about your Australian colonies. Are your people really going in for dividing South Britain?"

Then he began to talk about Australia, and Kooràli was surprised at the freshness and accuracy of his information. He told her that in his youth, when he had some thought of becoming a practical politician, he had had a conviction that an English statesman ought to make himself acquainted with the real condition of all England's colonies and dependencies, and that for that reason he had travelled through India, Canada, Australia, and all the colonial territories of Great Britain, and that he had tried to keep up his acquaintance with them ever since.

"But it has been of little use to me," he said, with a melancholy smile; "and of no use whatever to any one else. Mine, I am afraid, has not been a very useful career."

"I think it a pity," Kooràli said impulsively. "You might have been a great man." And then she blushed and thought she was becoming far too effusive.

"Why do you say that?" Lord Forrest asked. "You have no reason to form so good an opinion of my capacity. Who told you?"

Kooràli could not resist the kindly imperiousness of his tone. She

answered as a child might have done. "Mr. Morse said me you might have had a great career."

"Ah!" Lord Forrest said. "That was kind of him. I value his good opinion. I admire Mr. Morse."

"So do I," Koorâli said fervently.

"We represent the two utter extremes of political faith," Lord Forrest went on; "but I respect his convictions, his sincerity, and his capacity. Only I think he underrates the strength of the forces against which he has to struggle. He is about as much too far in advance as I am, they tell me, too far behind. He will be wrecked some day; but, then, he is young—in my sense quite young—and he can swim ashore and live to try the sea again; and, if he is like other politicians, he can learn how to trim his sails and so catch the benefit of every passing breeze from whatever quarter it may blow."

"Mr. Morse is not like other politicians," Koorâli protested with spirit.

"You think not? Well, so do I. Therefore he will be wrecked."

"A man must steer a certain course sometimes," Koorâli said, "even though he runs the chance of being wrecked. He must steer to save a sinking ship, whatever the risk to himself."

Lord Forrest looked at her with kindly eyes. "You have put your illustration well," he said. Then he changed the subject, and showed her some volumes of letters written by certain of his great ancestors.

An hour or two passed pleasantly away. Lord Arlen did not talk much. He left his father and Koorâli to do the talking between them. He wanted to bring them together; he knew if they were brought together his father would be attracted by Koorâli, and he was hoping that for a time when the protecting presence of such a man might be of some service to the wife of Cricket in Norway. He was well contented with the apparent results of his kindly experiment. Lord Forrest positively insisted that Koorâli must come again.

The old man came down the stairs and out into the hall with her. When she was saying good-bye, he took her hand in his.

"In the old days," he said, "a gentleman—when there were gentlemen in England—took leave of a fair guest after this fashion." He raised her hand to his lips, and his white moustache brushed her glove ever so lightly. Then he bade her good-bye; and she got into her carriage. Arlen opened the carriage door for her, and closed it when she was in.

"How do you like my father?" he asked, as he leaned on the carriage window.

"Oh, of course, I like him! I revere him," she said impetuously. "But that's nothing; every one must feel like that for him. But I do hope, oh, I do *so* hope, that he likes me."

"Yes; he likes you," Arlen said. "You have a friend in him if ever you want one. I know my father."

"I know you both," Koorâli thought as she drove away, and her eyes were wet.

CHAPTER XXIX

"THE INSEPARABLE SIGH FOR HER."

EVERY one was talking of the expected war; wondering when it was to break out. Many were impatient because every now and then it seemed to hang fire. Women in drawing-rooms chatted of it with light heart, and wished it would begin at once, in order that they might be amused. There much talk, too, of the coming popular demonstration; of the meeting in Hyde Park and the procession to Palace Yard. Many elderly men in the clubs were of opinion that the only way to deal with the whole affair was to plant a few cannon somewhere on the line of the procession and sweep the whole rascally crew away. "Put them down, sir! put them down!" That was the only policy. Men in the clubs were furious against Morse for the encouragement he was giving to these unwashed scoundrels, sir! "That's what comes of your colonial republicanism, by Jove!"

One day, to Kooràli's surprise, Lady Betty came to call upon her. Kooràli had given her up; thought that for some reason the acquaintanceship was at an end. Lady Betty looked pale and a little anxious. Her manner, in spite of its bright frivolity, was constrained. She did not talk in her former fresh and frank way. She had nothing to say about the discomfort of being the wife of an unpopular public man. She said very little about her husband. The conversation turned chiefly on the current gossip of London; social rather than political. After a while, Lady Betty began to make inquiry about the climate of Farnesia, the society of the place, and the social duties of a governor's wife.

"I have always thought I should rather like a position of that kind, if it didn't take one away from England and friends and all that," Lady Betty said vaguely. "There would be no complications, don't you know. No tiresome politics and socialism, which is all very amusing until it gets serious. And, then, it is so nice and so easy to make people happy. One has only to give plenty of parties and remember faces and say pretty things to the right persons."

Lady Betty sighed. It flashed across her that perhaps it was not always so easy to say the right thing when one had to deal with exceptional temperaments. She was a little impatient of exceptional temperaments, and fine theories and principles, and romantic fancies and emotions. She did not care for all that kind of thing, except as a picturesque background to pleasant life in the best society—the life of a model hostess, an affectionate wife, too well bred not to take her husband's devotion for granted.

Lady Betty's good breeding had the effect of saving her some serious heart pangs. She could not admit herself to be in a position of rivalry with any woman. Such a consciousness might fester in her mind, and in an indirect way influence her character and her actions; but she

would only recognize its existence when impelled against herself to do so. If, as now, she suffered through it, she would refuse to believe seriously in her suffering. She had not crushed her suddenly aroused jealousy of Kooràli by any effort of will, any strength of magnanimity. She had left it behind her in the depths she had sounded for a moment, and had risen again to the smooth surface and sought the shallows, determined to venture no more into troubled waters. Nevertheless, there was some suppressed agitation in Lady Betty's way of looking at and speaking to Kooràli—something which had never been in her manner before. She got up presently, and Kooràli rose too.

"I won't say good-bye to you, Mrs. Kenway, because I am quite certain to see you again before you leave for good."

"Let us say good-bye now," answered Kooràli, an impulse seizing her. She took Lady Betty's hand in hers. "I may not have an opportunity again of telling you—of saying how much I value all the kindness you have shown me since I came to England." She stopped for a moment. The eyes of the two women met. Lady Betty did not bend forward and kiss her friend, as she had often done so readily before. "I pray that you may be happy, Lady Betty—you and your husband."

Kooràli's voice trembled a little. She longed to say, "Oh, cling to him, Lady Betty; make yourself everything to him now; trust him; be generous to him—and to me." With the quick instinct of a woman who loves, Kooràli took in the whole sad situation—the division between husband and wife; the utter inability of the one to make any response to the other's need. Her own heart cried out in passionate sympathy, but no words would pass her lips. Lady Betty, in her fashionably cut mantle, with her pretty smile that no disappointment could dim, her charming chit-chat, the outcome of a narrow experience that had never ranged beyond courts and drawing-rooms, seemed to her at that moment the last woman to whom she could make such an appeal; and so the two parted with the usual conventional platitudes and expressions of good-will.

A feeling of restlessness came over Kooràli when Lady Betty had gone. She could not sit in the house. Something oppressed her. She wanted air and space and freedom to breathe. The afternoon was closing in. She put on her cloak and bonnet, and went out. Within doors sometimes the winter darkness and solemnity of this great London, with the roar of traffic sounding as from a distance, gave her the sense of being in a tomb, and the bustle and noise of the streets, the hurrying crowd, and the lights and life of the shops were at once a stimulant and a relief.

It was bitterly cold. The winter had set in with unusual severity, and, though as yet there had been no snow fall, the ground was frozen hard. Kooràli walked on quickly till she reached Hyde Park, and then, turning away from the frequented paths, struck into one of the quiet walks on the west side of the Serpentine. There always seemed to her a curious picturesqueness about this part of the park. She

liked the old gnarled trees, the long vistas which seemed to end at the horizon, the grey mist that clung to everything, and through which the moving figures looked like shrouded ghosts. The melancholy suggestiveness of it all touched some poetic chord in her nature. She sat down on a bench by the Serpentine for a few minutes. The sun was setting—the round red ball sinking slowly, with no roseate glow surrounding it, but getting gradually duller as the mist covered it, like the eye of some wounded Titan glazed by the dew of death. There was a light hoar-frost on the ground and on the laurel bushes, and the network of naked twig and bough showed black against the steely sky. The frozen water looked like a sheet of dull glass of the same tone as the mist and the sky. Now a gas-lamp was beginning to twinkle here and there. The scene was dreary and yet pathetic, and the loneliness seemed intensified by the roar of the invisible city. At intervals a figure stepped out of the fog, passing by where she sat. One with a stately swaying walk seemed to step forth more decidedly than the rest; and as she rose to move on homeward again, it halted abruptly before her, attracted by her involuntary exclamation. She had recognized Morse.

He had come out in the same mood as she herself—the expression of his face told her that. When she saw and knew him, a kind of terror seized her, and she would have hurried on, but it was too late.

"Mrs. Kenway!" he said. They shook hands. Her hand was cold. They looked at each other through the gathering darkness. For both the moment had a world of meaning and of misery. Soul and will struggled. There was no pressure of hands; only the merest conventional shake-hands. At that moment a little gust of wind swept by and blew up the dead leaves, and some drops of sleet fell. The evening had changed. Koorâli shivered, more from nervousness than from cold.

"There's a thaw coming," Morse said mechanically. "Why are you out at this hour?" he asked, turning upon her; "in this damp place, and so far from your home? It is not good for you—you who have never known an English winter."

"I'm going home now," said Koorâli submissively. "I wanted to walk—to have some air. And I like the cold grey look of everything. It's so different from anything I've ever seen before. It's more poetic——" She stopped, and gave that hard little laugh he had got to know. "We talk a great deal about our fine scenery and our wonderful sunsets, Mr. Morse," she went on, bravely taking up again the part she had laid down for a moment; "but I have seen a wonderful sunset to-day, and it seems to me that England is the land of surprises, and that it is Australia which is tame."

He smiled in an absent way. There was pain in the smile. "Well," he said, "you are going back again to your tropical sunsets."

"Yes," she answered nervously; "very soon. I ought to thank you—for——"

"No," he interrupted harshly. "Don't." There was a short

silence, and he resumed. "The elections are over, Mrs. Kenway, you see, and my prophecy has come true. I can do nothing for my friends; and I don't suppose that to-day there is a more unpopular public man in England than myself."

"You don't care?" she asked timidly.

"Care—I? Not a jot." He laughed. "But my wife cares; and my father-in-law cares; and my friends care;—all, except, perhaps—you."

"I care very much that you should reap the reward for patriotism and disinterestedness," she answered softly, and felt that she had uttered a mere platitude.

He laughed again in a chilling way. "Oh, rewards of that kind belong to a better world, don't they say? Duty is its own reward here. Doesn't an insane wish come over you sometimes that you might break the images and knock down the altars?"

She was silent. A sob seemed to choke her. They had been walking on. The wind was blowing stronger now, and the sleety shower fell more thickly. They had nearly reached one of the gates at the Bayswater side.

"Will you put me into a cab?" she said presently.

"Certainly."

He signed to a hansom, and put her in. When he had given the driver the direction, he lifted his hat without a word, and the cab drove off.

Kooràli leaned back with the despairing sense of one who has watched the treasure most coveted float by, and must not stretch forth a hand to stop it. Morse had said nothing about seeing her before she left England. He dared not trust himself or her. He would not bid her good-bye.

Morse turned again into the park, and tramped on along the broad walk, heedless of the now drenching rain. The sudden change in the night seemed to harmonize with that flash-like meeting and with his new mood. The mist, the thick masses of smoke-like clouds, the leafless boughs of the trees tossed wearily by the gusts of wind, the far horizon-line of lights on either side, the rain streaming against him—darkness, shadow, and light, the great, vast dun sky over his head, all taken together in their effect, wrought a strange, wild, sad moment of emotion in him. He slackened his walk and looked over the lonely scene, and with the half-poetic egotism which is in certain moods inseparable even from natures that are not selfish, he seemed to feel as if the winds, and lights, and shadows, and the sombre skies above him, were symbolic of his own life, his long-vanished youth; the years that were darkening round him, the storms of the future already heard approaching, the lost hopes and fond illusions of the past. To what had it all come—his struggles, his successes, his futile ambitions, even his very love of country and his longing for the welfare of its people—to what had it all come? Was it not now every day brought more and more directly, remorselessly, into his mind that he had

missed the one thing he would have held most dear in life; that it was still there within sight and reach of him, but as unattainable as though divided from him by impassable mountains or by death itself? The grave could not remove it from him more utterly than it was removed. For a moment his heart failed him and gave way. He came to a dead stand in the middle of the vast, dim, lonely park; came to a stand, and looked across the scene and up to the sky in which no faintest light of star was to be seen. Then he flung his right arm wildly up, and a sudden cry, an inarticulate, convulsive burst of emotion came from him. It relieved him; it roused him. He looked quickly around in all directions and peered through the mist, fearing he might have been seen by some curious eye. There was no one near. One should have been very near to see him and his action on such a night. No sound was to be heard but the roll of distant carriages and the rattle of far-off cabs. If he had been seen—the great tribune of the people, the strong man, the leader of democracy; if he had been seen to come to a sudden stand in the centre of Hyde Park, and fling up his arm like a man in a melodrama; if he had been heard to utter a cry of passion or pain, what would people have said? Morse found grim amusement in the question. It was not likely to occur again very soon he thought; it had not happened before. Yet he took account of it; it showed him something in himself of which he had not had full perception up to that moment. It gave him pause. It was as when a man who has hitherto lived in unbroken health, unconscious of the very existence of lungs and digestion and so forth, suddenly finds that some power or nerve or faculty has failed him; has failed him once, and may therefore fail him again and again. He is not dismayed; he will not make too much of it; but the thing has happened, and is a new and an ominous experience. So Morse felt about his sudden outburst of emotion. Then he set himself against the wind and rain, got his hat firmly on his head, and strode forward in the direction of Park Lane—to all outward seeming just the man he was before.

CHAPTER XXX.

MASTERSON AT HOME.

Morse was not a little surprised one morning to receive an early visit from the young foreign Envoy who has been already mentioned more than once in these pages.

"You are a man much pressed by affairs, Mr. Morse," he began, in English which was remarkable clear, and for the most part correct, although strained through the sieve of a foreigner's mental translation. "So am I. You may be sure when I come to take up your time it is not for the prunes, as Frenchmen say."

"I am glad to see you," Morse answered. "I should be all the more glad if I could think that you came to see me; I mean for the

sake of seeing me and having a talk. But, of course, I know you don't." Morse and the young Envoy had taken a liking one to the other, and both knew it.

"Ah! we are far too busy, you and I, for long friendly talks. We have to leave that to happier men. No; I have something to say to you; something for your particular hearing. Well, I was at one of your friend Masterson's meetings last night. I like to see things for myself, and so I went down. It was far away in the East End. I know you like Masterson; and for your sake I wish him well, although I cannot have any sympathy for a man who could think of putting himself at the head of an anarchist mob whom he is pleased to call 'the people.' However, that is not the point. The point is, that I think I recognized among his foreign associates two or three men whose faces are familiar to me."

"Yes?" Somehow Morse seemed to know what was coming.

"Yes; I think they are men who are or were employed in the service of our secret police."

Morse might well have exclaimed, "Oh, my prophetic soul!" He listened without interruption, but with the deepest attention and even anxiety.

"I think so; yes, I think so. Now, I do not know why these men were there or why they should not be there; I do not know if they were there on their own account, or were commissioned for some purpose to go there; I know nothing; I shall not make any inquiry. I am here a special envoy for one single purpose; with one mandate. I concern myself about nothing else; I should have no right even to ask questions about anything else. I only tell you this in the thought that if you desired you might give your friend a caution. Of one thing I am profoundly assured—that my Government have no wish to injure him more than he is already injuring himself; they care not for him as a man, and think not of him. I am equally convinced that they have nothing but the highest consideration, respect, admiration for you, Mr. Morse. In putting you on your guard, therefore, and enabling you, perhaps, to put him on his guard, I cannot be crossing any purpose of my Government, if any purpose there is. But you must remember I am taking a bold step; it is a responsibility; and I ask of you the utmost secrecy, consistent with your taking thought for yourself and giving your wild-headed friend a caution."

"What possible object could your Government have——"

"Perhaps they have not any; or, perhaps, they only wish to be well informed. Perhaps these men were sent to watch some of our Nihilists, whom your people obligingly shelter here in London. I cannot say; I do not know; I do not even try to guess. Now I ask pardon for having disturbed you, and taken up some of your time perhaps for nothing; nothing at all. The gracious Lady Betty is well, I hope? Is she yet in town? No?"

Morse did not try to bring the Envoy back to the subject of their conversation. He knew the attempt would be useless. A few words

of conversation on general subjects were interchanged, and then the Envoy took his leave.

Morse felt deeply grateful for the kindness which had been shown by this singular warning. It seemed to him likely that the foreign police agents, if they were such, were sent over to watch the doings of continental anarchists and Nihilists, rather than with any view to Masterson's agitation. Still, if it was the fact, as he had himself already suspected, that some of Masterson's associates were not the revolutionary agitators they professed to be, but were actually in the employment of a foreign police, it was of the utmost importance that Masterson should have warning of it. There was no time to be lost; it was not a matter for letter-writing or telegraphing, "I must go myself; I must find Masterson, and tell him at once." In less than five minutes from the departure of the Envoy, Morse found himself at the door of Masterson's house.

The house in which Masterson lived stood in a great sombre street which had been fashionable in its day, and that day was rather recent. Fashion, however, had suddenly receded from it, and already it was being assailed at its extremities, as human bodies are, by the first evidences of entire decay. Shops were beginning saucily to appear under the entablatures of what had lately been private dwelling-houses of stately and forbidding aspect. Masterson's house was a large heavy building with a great absorbing porch. Its broad flight of steps brought at once to the mind a picture of well-calved footmen running up and down and at each ascent knocking portentous double knocks. No footman now lifted that solid knocker of ancient bronze; no carriage stopped in front of that door; nor was the door ever opened by any pampered menial in livery and powder. The door, indeed, stood partly open when Morse reached it; and he was in some doubt whether he ought to knock or to walk boldly in. Not knowing, however, where to go if he did walk in, he knocked, and waited for an answer. No answer came, and so he knocked again. Yet no answering form appeared; and then he pushed the door a little more open, and entered a great stone-flagged hall. The hall was without carpet or rug of any kind, and echoed dismally to every tread of Morse's feet. Vast stone staircases mounted upwards, but Morse felt some hesitation about venturing on an ascent into the unknown regions above. He had some dim recollection of Masterson's study, a small, or comparatively small, room—none of the chambers in that mansion were really small—on the ground floor at the back. He made for this room, and found it. Its door was open; and on looking in he saw ample evidence of its still being used by Masterson as his study. There was a huge desk of antique and inconvenient form; there were two or three aged and decrepit chairs, on which, apparently, no one was expected to sit, for they were heaped and stacked with blue-books and newspapers. There were pens and ink-pots on the desk; and there were pigeon-holes crammed with letters, many of them on foreign paper and in foreign languages. There were newspapers stuffed into open drawers

—newspapers, many of which gave out that queer, damp, musty scent which is exhaled by the journals that come to us from India and other parts of the East.

Morse shook his head sadly as he noticed that there were various specimens of weapons scattered here and there, and many models in plaster and cork of the most approved fashion of street barricade, with pamphlets containing instructions as to the readiest way of fashioning your barricade out of the simplest materials, and the materials most nearly at hand. There were two or three specimen hooks which at first puzzled Morse not a little. They were not much larger than ordinary button-hooks, but they were sharp of edge and keen of point. One, however, guided him as to its explanation, for it was lying on a little pamphlet or treatise in French which professed to teach the construction and use of the implements most serviceable for the sudden cutting of the reins of cavalry horses, and thus placing the riders of the steeds at the mercy of a people rising in their wrath and their majesty and their might. From a hasty glance at a paper lying open on the desk, Morse saw that some association or other had been offering a reward for the best design for some implement which could enable the aforesaid people in the same state of uprisen and righteous anger to twist by one single sudden wrench the bayonet of despotism from the gun-barrel of despotism's hireling, the soldier.

Morse's heart sank within him at the sight of these evidences of preparation for "the revolution." But his heart only sank because he looked on them as mere evidences of the infatuation into which his old friend was dropping deeper and deeper every day. He did not attach the slightest importance to them as proofs of any deep-laid revolutionary plot against which it behoved society to be on its guard. Morse had not the slightest faith in Masterson's revolution. He had no faith in it, and he was not afraid of it. He justly thought that he understood the temper and the feelings of the English working-classes on the whole much better than Masterson did; and he did not believe that there was among them the making of a political or social revolution; at all events as yet. It had occurred to him more than once that if England were to be drawn into a great foreign war by a Minister who was supposed to be acting under the influence of the Court, and if England were to sustain one great defeat to begin with, a sudden republican revolution might be the result. But even in that case he felt convinced that poor Masterson's melodramatic preparations, his treatises on barricades, and his weapons for cutting bridle-reins and twisting bayonets, would count for next to nothing.

Meanwhile nobody appeared to be coming, and Morse thought it about time to invite some attendance. The best thing, he supposed, would be to ring the bell in this study of Masterson's. No movement could be more natural certainly; but in this instance no movement could be less practicable; for the bell-rope had long since fallen down, and was lying in a dusty little coil near the chimney-piece, looking like a snake that had just crept out of a dust-bin in time to give up

the ghost on a hearthrug. Morse was thinking whether it would not be well to go in for the melodramatic after a fashion in keeping with the place and its suggestions, and shout, "Hallo, house there!" after the ways of the imitation Elizabethan stage. He heard voices every now and then upstairs; the voices chiefly of women, and sometimes, as it seemed to him, the wailing of children. The house was not deserted; that was one comfort. Was he to shout? Was he to mount the stairs and explore for himself? Was he to go away and write to Masterson and ask him to appoint an interview somewhere? While he was debating these questions, finding the situation at once odd, interesting, and uncomfortable, he suddenly heard a hasty step outside, and Masterson himself appeared at the study door.

The socialist chief seemed surprised and a good deal embarrassed at the sight of Morse. Morse hastened to explain that he had intruded into the study only because he could not find any one to direct him where he ought to go.

"Yes, yes," Masterson said, still a little embarrassed; "we are rather an irregular sort of household here; always more or less out of order, as you see—as you see! Well, and how is Lady Betty? And how are things going? Sit down, Morse; sit down, my dear fellow; if you can find a chair—if you can find a chair."

While Masterson was speaking he kept glancing quickly and uneasily at the door, as if in fear of some unwelcome intrusion.

"Thanks," Morse answered. "Never mind about a chair; I am all right. I have to put in so much sitting in my life that I like to stand when I get the chance. No, never mind removing your papers; let them stay as they are. I have to go off almost at once; I only came to say——"

Just at this moment the clack of a woman's shoes was heard on the stairs and near the door, and in a moment the wearer of the clacking shoes made her appearance in the study. She was a tall, harsh-featured, angular old lady, with thin white hair, and she was dressed in a gown of severe and unlovely black stuff.

"Leaving the hall door open again, Mr. Masterson! Well, I never saw such a man! As if there were no thieves and robbers about, outside the house as well as within."

Masterson smiled a distressed sort of smile. "I am afraid, Mrs. Grounds," he said, "that we haven't much in this house to tempt any thief who happens to be possessed of a sagacious mind. Let me introduce you, Morse. This is Mrs. Grounds, a dear old friend of mine, widow of a very dear old friend of mine; and she is kind enough to act as housekeeper for me, and try to maintain something like order in this house; in which I am afraid she is not allowed much chance of being very successful."

"No, indeed," Mrs. Grounds assented with a series of severe and Jove-like noddings of the head; "you are quite right there, Mr. Masterson. What with one socialist family sick on the drawing-room floor, and a socialist baby just brought into this wicked world on the

floor above; and a colony of Nihilists, and I don't know what other enemies of the public peace established in the attics, and a few nigger minstrels, or persons looking like nigger minstrels, on the kitchen level, there isn't much likelihood certainly of my being able to keep order. Is this gentleman staying for luncheon, Mr. Masterson? I dare say he is. Or for dinner, perhaps? And there is nothing fit to eat in this house, I can tell you, and no time to get anything; for the butcher won't bring what's been ordered before six o'clock, and it will be rather late for ordering anything else at that time."

"No, Mrs. Grounds, don't be alarmed," Morse said, with a smile; "I couldn't stay for luncheon even if Masterson were to ask me; which he hasn't done, I can assure you."

"I am afraid Mr. Morse would not care much for our style of entertainment in this house, Mrs. Grounds," Masterson said, with an effort to be pleasant. "This is Mr. Morse, Mrs. Grounds, the future Prime Minister of England, people say."

"Well, I'm sure, Mr. Masterson, I never said he wasn't," the good Mrs. Grounds graciously replied. "I wish, sir, when you do become Prime Minister, you would do something, bring in some law or something of the kind, to save honest decent English folk from being eaten out of house and home by foreign conspirators of all sorts. I wish you would pass some law, sir, to put Mr. Masterson, as he is a friend of yours, back into the possession of his right senses. I don't see what is the use of a Government at all, if it can't do something to save its friends from being beggared and brought to the workhouse. Excuse me, sir, if I talk too freely—a poor old widow woman offering her advice to a great man; but, as you are a friend of Mr. Masterson, perhaps you won't take it altogether amiss of me."

"Well, well, Mrs. Grounds," Masterson tried to intervene in a tone half vexed, half timid, "Mr. Morse won't care to hear any more of all this."

"Excuse me, sir," Mrs. Grounds replied severely, "I should leave Mr. Morse to speak for himself on that head, sir, if you please. I dare say he knows his own mind."

"I know my own mind concerning our friend Masterson quite well, Mrs. Grounds," Morse said good-humouredly; "and I fancy you and I would agree pretty well on the subject we have been talking about. I have scolded Mr. Masterson many a time."

"You didn't scold any sense into him, I'm afraid, sir?"

"Mrs. Grounds evidently does not believe much in your revolution, Masterson?" Morse said, with a smile.

"Revolution? Social revolution?" Mrs. Grounds said with a voice expressive of boundless scorn. "I'd revolutionize them, if I had my way. A pack of lazy London louts that wouldn't do a decent stroke of work if they could; and a gang of dirty long-haired foreigners that come over here to escape the galleys in their own country—which they richly deserve I'm sure; and I only wish we had the galleys here ready for them——"

"Come, come, come! Mrs. Grounds," Masterson interposed, with knitted eyebrows and eyes that began to flash ominously.

"Come, come, come! Mr. Masterson. I don't mind about 'Come, come, come!' I only wish you would say, 'Go, go, go!' to the lot of them. Why must they instal themselves in this house, Mr. Morse, I ask you, sir, as a man who knows things and understands things? Can't they revolutionize without eating him out of house and home? Have they no lodgings of their own? I assure you, Mr. Morse, that unfortunate man hasn't at this present moment a bed to sleep in. He has *not*, sir. He has given it up to a socialist friend and the socialist friend's wife—I only hope she *is* his wife——"

"Now, now, now!" Masterson ejaculated impatiently.

"Now, now, now! Yes. I'm talking of now, now, now. I am telling Mr. Morse of what is going on this very moment while we stand and talk here. Mr. Morse, I dare say you know that this unfortunate man had a fine property once, and that he has muddled it all away on his revolutions and his conspirators; and he'll die in a workhouse, so he will!"

"Oh, it's all absurdity," Masterson hurriedly struck in. "It's nothing like so bad as that, Morse, I can assure you. My good friend, Mrs. Grounds, is too anxious about my interests, and she exaggerates things. You see, it's this way; I come upon a man who has good and true ideas and who has the great gift of being able to talk to his fellow-men in language that goes home to them—it's a rare faculty that, Morse, as you know well in your House of Commons—and I want to make use of him. I set him to address a meeting in the park on the Sunday. Very good; what happens then? His employer, perhaps, is some wretched petty trader with all the meanness of the greatest capitalist about him. He sends for my friend and discharges him. What can I do? I can't leave that poor fellow and his wife and his little ones out in the cold. Now, can I? Could you? Would you? There it is; that's the whole thing."

"But don't they ever mean to do a stroke of work again?" Mrs. Grounds sharply demanded.

"Yes; that is a question I was going to put," Morse said. "I quite accept your point of view, Masterson; but, then, how will it be if these men get into the way of merely living on you—quartering their wives and their families on you? How if you are converting them from workers into spouters first, and paupers afterwards?"

"Spouters! Paupers!" Masterson exclaimed. "I wish you knew them, Morse. You mustn't really judge of my fellow-workers by any experiences drawn from your House of Commons and the dull idlers and bloated capitalists and heartless spouters who belong to it. There isn't one of the friends whom I shelter in this house who is not heart and soul in the people's cause, and who would not work his fingers to the bone rather than accept one penny of private charity or parish relief."

"What d'ye call this but private charity?" Mrs. Grounds expostu-

lated. And she pointed first up and then down to denote that what she meant by "this," was the occupation of Masterson's house, upstairs, downstairs, and in what used to be my lady's chamber.

"It isn't private charity," Masterson said, turning on her with flashing eyes. "It is a friend and colleague who still happens to have a house, such as it is, and invites his less fortunate friend and colleague to come and stay a few nights with him. If Mr. Morse asks me to dine with him, and I go, am I accepting charity from him?"

"Ah, go along," Mrs. Grounds disdainfully murmured. "I do declare the man is getting off his head altogether."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mrs. Grounds; you ought indeed," Masterson exclaimed.

"I ought to be, perhaps, but I certainly ain't," was Mrs. Grounds' reply; "not of *that* anyhow. But it isn't any use talking." She swept in wrathful majesty out of the room.

"You mustn't mind her, Morse; you musn't mind her," Masterson said, with an effort to be cheerful. "It's all because of her interest in me. She is a good soul."

"Any one can see that," Morse said; "and I am not certain that there is not a good deal of sound common sense in what she has been saying. Tell me—you said she is a widow of an old friend of yours? Who was he—did I know him?"

"I don't know; you may have seen him. He was my father's valet; a most faithful servant; and he was very fond of me when I was a boy. He travelled with us a good deal, and I may well call him a friend. When he married this poor woman, they bought a house and let lodgings there. But things didn't go well; and he died some years ago. My house was empty then, and I took her to act as housekeeper for me; and she has done so ever since. And of course she has a temper and says sharp things. She can't help it, you know—we have all our little ways; but she is eaten up with the zeal of my house," Masterson added, smiling faintly. "So I think, Morse, I must just let her have her way."

"But it seems to me that that is the very thing you do not do; you don't let her have her way."

"Oh, about sheltering these poor people—these poor friends of mine? No, no; I couldn't do that. That is a matter of principle, of duty, of friendship—I couldn't give way on that, Morse; and besides, she exaggerates. Yes, yes; she exaggerates, I assure you. Things are not nearly as bad as she would give you to understand. I am not by any means the simple-hearted philanthropist she would make me out. No, no; oh no; I know very well what I am doing, Morse. I keep a pretty sharp look-out, I can tell you. I am not at all a man to be taken in."

"About that," said Morse, with a smile, "I don't feel quite so sure; and that just brings me to the business about which I have come intruding on you to-day."

"Intruding! Morse, my very dear friend, please don't use such a

word as that. You are always welcome here:" and Masterson spoke with the graciousness of a prince doing the honours of a palace.

"Well, I am afraid I had only too good reason for suspecting that some of your foreign associates are not exactly what they profess to be, Masterson: and I came to put you on your guard against them. I have good authority for what I say."

Masterson's brow darkened. "I think we had better not approach that subject, Morse. You know we can't agree. I am in possession of all your views. You are a politician, and you distrust men. I know these men. Let us not speak on this painful subject any more."

"But I am bound to tell you what I have heard. You must listen to me. Come, dear old friend, don't be quite so obstinate. At all events, listen to what I have to say. I have good reason for saying it."

Masterson stiffly assented: and Morse told him what he had heard, and gave him to understand that he had heard it from one who at least knew what he was talking about. Masterson listened with constraint rather than patience until Morse had quite finished—Morse's story was not long—and then he broke out.

"I was warned of this," he exclaimed excitedly. "I may say I knew it would come; I was expecting it——"

"Expecting what? Expecting my visit and my warning?"

"Expecting that somebody—not you, certainly, my dear Morse, but somebody—would come and tell me these men were police agents and spies. Yes: I was warned; but I never thought the agents of that brutal despotism could have got over you. No: that I did not expect. And so you, even you, are a victim to their deceitfulness, and are made the unconscious tool of their cruelty?"

Nothing that poor Masterson could say could possibly offend Morse. He was concerned for his ruined old friend; was anxious to serve him; to save him; and it was nothing to him whether Masterson took his intervention in good part or not, thanked him or reviled him. He listened in perfect good-humour to Masterson's wild outpourings.

"These men themselves told me," Masterson went on to say, "that the minions of the brutal despotism which grinds down their country would strive to injure them here by spreading abroad the report that they were creatures of its own authority and in its accursed pay. They warned me long ago of this odious and futile artifice. How you could have been talked over, Morse, is more than I can understand. But you never much believed in my organization; you never trusted my judgment of men; you seem to me to have just the ordinary Englishman's dislike and distrust of foreigners. Of course, I am personally much obliged to you, Morse; and it shows your friendly feeling towards myself, and all that; but you are mistaken about these men. Or, rather, you are misinformed: you are deceived by some who have a motive in deceiving you. I am sorry; I wish you could better understand the feelings of that brotherhood which surpasses narrow nationalism: but no man keeps up the freshness of his heart long who sits in the House of Commons."

"Then my warning is quite thrown away?" Morse said, moving as if to go.

"Not its kindness, Morse; not its kindness; that is felt and appreciated. But I can see through the crafts that have apparently blinded you; and when I know men I trust them. I suppose it would be useless for me to press you to join us in our great peace demonstration?"

"Quite useless," Morse said. "I don't like some of your company, Masterson; and that's the truth of it. Besides, I am not certain that you will not do more harm than good as things stand. If there is anything like a row, it will bring discredit on your whole movement; and any little gang of ruffians may get up a row."

"Our movement," Masterson said, drawing himself up with an air of self-asserting dignity, "has no ruffians associated with it. Ruffianism stands back abashed before the sanctity of the people's cause and the solemn march of the people's movement."

"Yes," Morse said. "I am glad—if it be so. Good-bye, old friend."

Masterson was softened. He gave his hand with cordiality, and the friends parted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"THE FIRST DAY OF LIBERTY."

THE heart of Masterson swelled high within him when, after a sleepless night, he rose on the morning of the day that was, he firmly believed, to begin the new era of international peace. He and his associates had arranged to get up a great national demonstration against the war policy of the Government and of the ruling classes generally. The demonstration was to begin by a monster meeting, which was to form itself into a procession, representing all manner of trades and associations of working-men and democratic organizations; and the procession was to march down to the House of Commons and endeavour to impress the Government and the legislators with a sense of the national will.

The procession was to include foreigners as well as Englishmen; for was it not a demonstration in favour of international peace, brotherhood, and goodwill? Masterson's much-revolving mind had been already in advance making schemes for a like demonstration in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg. He proposed to put himself at the head of each demonstration, and to associate with him men of divers nationalities. It was of the utmost importance that the first demonstration should be made in London, where there was no likelihood of its being prohibited in advance. The example of London would show that its object, if it were allowed to act, was only peace and international fraternity among all peoples. If emperors and kings would bar the way, then emperors and kings must take the consequences. The true union of peoples nothing could resist.

Masterson had been growing more fanatical and more dreamy day

after day. He firmly believed that he had the whole working population of England at his back, and that he was in good faith offering the Crown and the Government a last chance of a peaceful settlement. He could not think but that Ministers would recognize the strength of his movement and the necessity for bowing before it. Should they fail to do so, then his honest conviction was that by a mere demonstration of the number and majesty of the people the monarchy would fall and the republic be established. He wrote letters to his friends—to Morse among the rest—this particular morning, and dated them, "The first day of England's liberty." His soul was filled with the greatness of his cause and of his movement. He thought it nothing but a generous concession to established institutions and ancient political creeds which allowed to the Government and to the monarchy itself one other chance of existence. He vindicated this concession to his own mind by the thought of the strength and magnanimity of the people.

"The English people are strong," he said, "and they know their strength; they know, too, how to be merciful."

Some of his more impatient followers chafed at what they called Masterson's moderation. Certain of the foreign democrats in particular were angry with him, and insisted that there ought to be no other chance given to effete and vicious systems. Some went so far as to say that Masterson was pulling down the international flag. Masterson, however, was determined; angry opposition only made him more determined than before.

From an early hour on the momentous day, and from all parts of London, crowds kept converging upon the appointed centre in the park.

It was a curious and chaotic gathering. Liberty and Peace had strange representatives hanging to their skirts. There was something melancholy and picturesque in the sight of the streams of poverty-stricken men and women that trickled through the park gates after the more orderly array on that grey December morning—beery, red-nosed old men; unkempt street loiterers, depraved and sickly-looking; impish *gamins;* truculent roughs; coarse women in tattered clothing; wan-faced, wistful-eyed children;—the usual constituents of a London crowd. But this was in some respects unlike a London crowd; it faintly suggested the call of the tocsin, the *Ca Ira*, the slaughter at the barricades.

There were many foreigners—wiry French, swarthy Italians, strange long-haired Germans, Poles, Russians,—every nationality, it seemed, leavening the British mob. Some looked eager and excited, some indifferent. Most of them gesticulated more or less. There was an odd babel of tongues—a good-humoured buzz, with now and then an ominous imprecation. Many women had bright-coloured skirts and shawls and red head-dresses, and there were red flags waving here and there. As a ray of sunshine broke the grey clouds, the flaring patches of crimson stood out in vivid relief. Some of the better-clad men wore tri-coloured scarves, and now and then might be seen a musty blue

and red uniform. More than one mounted man wore the red cap of Liberty.

Even in the main body of the procession the foreign element was also distinct. This was to consist of the various organizations and clubs we have mentioned; and these came along in semi-military order and array, generally with bands, and always with a liberal display of banners and gilt letters on white or blue or red backgrounds. There were bands in waggonettes also; and there was a huge cart, a very tumbril, which bore enthroned the monster petition. But, besides the associations which had an obvious and direct connection with the movement, there were all manner of odd eccentric organizations, which seemed to have attached themselves to it for no particular reason whatever but because it was to march, and they thought they might as well be marching too. Not a crotchet, not a craze the human mind in its queerest moods is capable of, that did not seem eager to display itself through its representative organization there that day. One could understand the place of the "Middle Clerkenwell Death-To-Tyrants Brotherhood;" but why the "Anti-Potato Association"? why the "Anti-Perforated-Postage-stamp Club"? why the "Woman-Not-Man's Master League"? why the "Union for the Prohibition of Smoking by Youths of Tender Age"? why the "Sisterhood for the Suppression of Tea-drinking"? All these, and various other equally important bands, came tramping and drumming to the spot fixed for the start, and became part of the English people manifesting itself in all its majesty and strength. So, too, did a good many of the common-place roughs. The idle lookers-on, vast in numbers, made no claim to strength and majesty.

The procession assembled in the middle of Hyde Park. It was to march along Piccadilly and down St. James's Street into Pall Mall. It was to traverse Pall Mall and Cockspur Street and pass into Whitehall and down Parliament Street until it reached Westminster Palace. There arrived, it was to disregard with noble calmness the rule which forbids the assembling of great masses of people too near to the Houses of Parliament. In the name of the people and of peace it was to enter, occupy, and fill Palace Yard. Then Masterson proposed that he and a certain number of the leaders of the movement should insist on having an interview with some of the Ministers in the outer lobby and present the monster petition. That done, the Ministers were to be invited to come down to the entrance of Westminster Hall and see for themselves whether the vast multitude outside did not amount to the significance of a national demonstration. Of the strength of the foreign contingent—an argument in itself—Masterson was not quite fully aware. The Ministers were to be solemnly given to understand that day after day a procession as large or larger, would come down to the House of Commons, and would make formal protest against the intended war, until the Government should declare that no war was intended any more. There was to be no force and no intimidation; but the majesty of the people was to overawe by its moral grandeur

the petty policy of a Court and a party. Should, however, the Ministers, ill-advised, take steps to prevent the delegates of the people from entering the courtyard of the people's palace, then the responsibility must rest on the heads of those who met a moral protestation by forceful resistance. Come what would, the delegates would enter Palace Yard and demand speech of the advisers of the Crown.

The procession moved amid the bare and leafless trees of the park. Masterson was on horseback. Upon his figure the eye of the spectator instantly fastened. A tricoloured scarf round his waist represented in some new combination of hues universal liberty, equality, and fraternity. His lean nervous frame, usually prematurely bowed, was erect now. The long thin hair, neglected of late, almost touched his shoulders. The grey beard swept his chest. The whole face was alight with intense excitement, and the eyes had in them the gleam which might be seen in the eyes of a patriot or a martyr.

As he led the march out of the park, and surveyed as well as he might the nature and extent of his following, he could not help wishing that the discipline of his national army was a little better sustained; and that there were not so many roughs and street arabs and communistic-looking foreigners hanging on the skirts of the host. There were some banners flying too which even he did not greatly care to see amid his ranks. There were the flags of some foreign revolutionary clubs, the devices of which had as much to do with war against religions as with war against kings. There were men at the head of some of these clubs who were well-known to have publicly advocated dynamite and the dagger as among the legitimate resources of "The Revolution." But what could be done? After all, these men too belonged to the great brotherhood of humanity. If they went too far or moved in a wrong direction, who was responsible? Who but the unauthorized agents of an anti-popular and unnatural system which ground the faces of the poor and put all true labour under the feet of the prince, the peer, and the capitalist?

Masterson had intended that the army he led should be on this occasion a peaceful array. He had given orders that every one was to come unarmed. Before they had begun to move on, some of the more trusty of his followers came and told him that a considerable number of those forming the procession had revolvers and other weapons. One very prudent adviser even talked of the expediency of breaking up and postponing the demonstration altogether. Masterson replied to this timid counsel by giving the word to march.

The day was fine, a grey day, with a faint vaporous fog hanging over the city, and veiling crude outlines. The sun shone through it at intervals round and red. It had been struggling all day with the December mist. As the procession moved, the sun prevailed at last, and shone with a mild and softening glow over the park and the streets. Masterson hailed its light as a good omen. A few of the chiefs and captains of the movement rode with him, wearing scarves like himself, and like him bearing neither stick nor stave. It was

intended that men on horseback at various intervals should keep the line of the procession dressed up and in good order. The movement was maintained fairly well in the park, but disarray and even disorder began to set in the moment the procession got into the streets. It became mixed up sometimes inextricably with the rush of traffic; here and there it swept the ordinary lines of traffic along with it; but in other places it broke confusedly, hopelessly, against some long and solid succession of vast waggons and ponderous drays and heavy crowded omnibuses. It got into wrangles with drivers and policemen and peaceful wayfarers. Sometimes half the procession was cut off from the other half, and trying to wait or to hark back was forced into greater confusion than ever. Tempers began to be aroused. The ordinary street passengers, detesting the whole thing, were wroth with the authorities for not sweeping it off the streets altogether. There were vehement little collisions with the police here and there; helmets were knocked off, truncheons were pretty freely used, and there were broken heads before the main body of the procession had got into St. James's Street. The balconies and windows of the clubs in St. James's Street were crowded with spectators, all of whom, including those at the Devonshire Club, the majority of those in the procession regarded as "bloated aristocrats" whose idle supervision they were disposed to resent. Sometimes there were hisses and groans from the line of procession as it passed under unpopular balconies and windows. Once or twice, some rough or street *gamin* sent a stone flying at a window pane. It was already plain that the majestic and peaceful demonstration was in very fair chance of turning into a disorderly exhibition of individual roughness, bad temper, and incapacity. Masterson galloped back several times to rebuke disorder and entreat forbearance, in the name of the sovereign people. But already his heart was sinking within him at the prospect.

Now and again a party cry sounded, and the name of some political leader was called out, generally with groans. Alarm was getting abroad. Carriages turned hastily into back streets. Ladies' heads appeared for a moment at brougham windows, and were withdrawn in terror. Lady Betty Morse was one of those whose carriage came in the way of the procession. She had been shopping, and was returning to Park Lane. She had heard nothing of the monster demonstration. There was a block just where her carriage was drawn up, and her coachman was not able to obey the order to get quickly out of Piccadilly. The crowd thronged round. One or two roughs came close to the brougham windows. After her first impulse of fear, Lady Betty sat quite erect. She had some of the courage as well as the pride of race. A shrill French voice cried out "À bas les aristocrats." Lady Betty was not an imaginative person, but she began to conjure up visions of the *tricoteuses*, and to wonder if she were in sober England.

A dour, horrible-looking creature, who carried a crate containing iron implements used in some manufacture, and who had hooked himself on to the procession, peered in at her for a moment, and frightened

her by his glare of hatred. She heard him in a sullen tone addressing the men near him. "Who is it stops up the roads and tramples on the people? Damn the aristocrats, with their carriages and horses and their sniggering jiggering servants. It's them that makes wars and makes revolutions. Who made the French revolution? Who's making the English one?—What's that?" And he tore on, pressing against the rushing throng. "Hurrah for Morse, the people's leader! He's the people's friend. No war, no Court! Morse, the republican, that's the man for us!"

Lady Betty heard her husband's name caught up by a thousand tongues. What did it mean? Was he inciting the English to revolt? She pulled wildly at the check-string. A footman turned his scared face down to the glass in front of the brougham. He dared not get off his perch.

"What is it?" cried Lady Betty. "What has your master to do with it?"

"Oh, my lady!" shouted the man. "We can't make out. They are saying it's Mr. Morse in one of the balconies, and that he is going to speak to them. They've begun breaking the club windows. But it's passing on, my lady. We shall be able to move in a minute."

Lady Betty uttered a cry of bewilderment. "Go home," she cried, "as quickly as you can. Turn down one of the side streets."

A policeman caught the horses' heads. The way began to clear a little. He looked into the carriage to reassure its occupant, and recognized Lady Betty. He had seen her drop her husband in Palace Yard.

"It's all right for you now, my lady," he said. "They have mistaken somebody for Mr. Morse, and they are shouting to him to speak."

Lady Betty drove on, the frightened horses urged to speed by the no less frightened coachman.

But the look of terror did not fade from Lady Betty's face. It seemed to her that she was not to be left one shred of illusion. Republicanism had come too close to her to keep any vestige of picturesqueness; to be anything but a horror. She had heard her husband's name coupled with that of Masterson, the democrat, heard him acclaimed by communists as the people's leader, the avowed advocate of a republic. He the leader of such brutes as these—the inciter of a street riot!

She did not know what had happened, or try to think what might happen. She had not imagination enough to prefigure any startling calamity. But she knew enough to make her feel that her little world which had been so prosperous was crumbling to atoms. She had a wild longing to fly from all that had brought her trouble, to go back to her own old sphere, to seek the protection—not of her husband, he had ranged himself on the other side—but of the Court and the aristocrats, to whose order she belonged, and whom he hated. She had no impulse to cast in her lot with his in the struggle—if there was going

to be a struggle. This shock showed her that her natural tendency was not to hold with him, but to stand apart from him.

The policeman was right. A tall straight-featured man standing in the balcony of a Liberal club had been mistaken for Morse by some of the leaders in the mob. The cry swelled. A roar of enthusiasm set in.

It was a long time before the mistake was discovered. Execrations followed cheers when the man in question withdrew with an air of contempt into the building. Not all Masterson's efforts and protestations could make things clear. Morse's name was shouted, coupled with democratic cries and wild appeals that he would show himself and go down with the demonstrationists to Westminster.

A group of well-dressed men, not yet in fear of missiles, came out on the balcony of a well-known club, and seemed to find considerable amusement in watching the wild confusion below. The laughter of these men excited the mob to fever pitch. In less than a minute the Monster Peace Demonstration had become one of lawless riot. Red flags waved. The few ineffectual policemen who had gathered on the skirts of the tumult were beaten down. Fierce revolutionary cries sounded; gravel and stones whizzed through the air. Then came a crash of breaking glass. Every window on the ground-floor was battered. Then an infuriated rush on to other buildings; more breaking glass—more ruin and destruction.

Only when Masterson charged into the very thick of the wreckers, and called upon them to right and left in accents of passionate reproach and entreaty not to defeat the very object of their mission by this display of violence, was some sort of order restored.

By dint of his exertion the procession was induced to re-form itself, some few knots of insurgents lingering to launch stones in an aimless fashion at carriages hurrying down the side streets, and at the windows of shops in St. James's Street, then skurrying on to swell the main body.

The procession turned into Pall Mall and was passing the gates of Marlborough House. As we have mentioned more than once, an idea had gone abroad that the war policy was favoured or inspired by the Court; at all events by some of the royal princes. Many of the German democrats in particular were highly wroth with Royalties. As the procession was passing the gates of Marlborough House some groans and hisses were set up, and these increased and became tumultuous. Masterson, believing that comparative order had been restored, and fully occupied in exhorting his own particular following, was far ahead when these sounds began; the main body had nothing to do with them. But the rear of the procession came to a sudden halt in an irregular and spontaneous way outside the gates, and set up a furious groaning, hissing, and yelling. A carriage was at the gate with some occupants—ladies, it appeared; no one could tell who they were—and some alarm was felt by them, seemingly; for there was a hasty knocking at the gate, and one of the footmen ran and held hasty counsel with a soldier doing duty as sentry. The gate was sud-

denly shot open, the carriage and its occupants absorbed in an instant within its shelter, and the gates closed again with a clang. As if under the fear that an attack of some kind was to be made, the two sentries stood in front of the closed gates. The mob—for that part of the tail of the procession which had come to a stand in front of Marlborough House could now only be called a mob—seemed to resent this idea, and began to make demonstrations of violence. The hisses and groans were furiously repeated, vituperative epithets in foreign tongues sounding distinctly, and some hands from the outside of the crowd began to fling stones again. Some of the stones broke a few panes of glass in the windows of a neighbouring club. Some shot over the gates of Marlborough House, and, as it was promptly reported, smashed several panes of glass there. How the story was passed on so quickly no one could tell; but the last stone had hardly o'erperched the wall of Marlborough House when the news was spread all over the House of Commons that an attack had been made by the mob on the residence of the Prince of Wales, and that the ladies of the family had been compelled to seek for safety. At the same time it is only fair to say that the exaggerated report reached our heroic mounted Quixote of democracy, Masterson, almost as quickly. Never in his earlier years had he made his way across country with greater energy than he now rode back to prevent outrage and disorder from gaining the day. When he did get back, he had yet influence enough to prevail upon the crowd to move on from Marlborough House, and to endeavour to form itself once again into the line of procession. But he was shocked and grieved to find what a hideous proportion of the element of the mere rough had got mixed up with all this part of the National Demonstration. His efforts at order were sometimes met with curses and jeers. One of the foreign democrats, out of whose clutch he tried to drag a revolver, pointed the weapon directly at his head. He heard windows crashing in as he turned into Whitehall, and all along the way there were fierce little collisions between those who belonged to the procession and those who did not belong to it.

Masterson had lost his place at the head of the march, and was not able to regain it. When he got at last in front of the gates of Palace Yard, he found that the yard was already nearly filled with the mere vanguard of the procession, and that the police were trying to close the gates against all further comers. Exaggerated rumours of the attack on Marlborough House had already spread consternation. A large body of police was assembled at Westminster, and fierce determination not to yield an inch to the miscreants was expressed on the face of every man of it. He was just able to get off his horse and squeeze his way in; and then he found that the crowd behind him were trying to force their way. The moment he got inside the gates he saw that all was practically over, so far as any chance of direct communication with any members of the Government was concerned. The police and the crowd were already in fierce conflict. He saw men brandishing knives; he heard the patter of the revolver, the police

with their truncheons were battling for their lives. He rushed into the heart of the crowd to make a last effort in the cause of liberty.

* * * * * * *

It was Wednesday, and the House of Commons, according to its usage, was sitting from twelve o'clock until six in the evening. Wednesday is commonly given up to the measures of private members. It is a day of independent statesmanship. It was an observation of Edmund Burke, that he generally found indepen lent men in Parliament to be men on whom nobody could depend. The independent statesmanship of the Wednesday is rather often a statesmanship on which no one can depend for any definite and practical results. It is the day of the parliamentary Sisyphus, who rolls his measure up to the top of the hill only to have it come rolling down again the moment the clock-fingers point to a quarter to six. For then the Speaker, according to rule, rises, perhaps in the very middle of some orator's sentence, calls "Order, order!" and proclaims the debate at an end, the remaining quarter of an hour being devoted to the formality of postponing successively all the other measures on the notice-paper.

Morse had come down to the House because he felt a sort of interest in some Bill that was to be brought on. He had not thought very much about the monster procession and its petition. He had received Masterson's letter with its date signalizing the birth of England's liberty; but he had put it half sadly away, and had no expectation or fear that anything in particular would come of it. He had been reading in the library in a listless sort of way. He had a huge volume in his hands, and every one who passed through was sure he was studying some important political subject. The truth was that the book he had taken up was a French translation of some minute Arabian *memorabilia* concerning the life and sayings of Mahomet; which Morse read with but a languid interest. After a while he got up and went out of the library and on to the terrace. The day was soft and bright for the time of year and the climate, and the grey and dull-red walls of Lambeth Palace looked venerable and picturesque in the mild sunlight. Morse lit a cigar, and paced the long stretch of terrace alone. Perhaps there came into his mind some thought of the evening when Kooràli and he walked on that terrace together, and when he did not yet quite suspect that he felt too deep an interest in her. Anyhow his thoughts took a somewhat melancholy turn.

Suddenly he began to hear great noises somewhere in the near distance. There was a sound as of commotion, of multitudes, even of struggle. Then he remembered all at once Masterson's first day of liberty, and the monster procession, and the petition that was to be presented; and he began to be afraid some disturbance was taking place. Heavens! was that the sound of fire-arms—quite near?

There were several groups of members on the terrace. A great number of men had come down for the express purpose of seeing the procession and the whole business. Some had been posted high up in the Clock Tower to have the better view. A sudden piece of news

was given to the members on the terrace as the crack of the revolvers sounded, which made them all start up and run as if they had heard the division bell. One man whom Morse knew personally ran past him and just stopped to cry out, "Hallo, Morse, your democrat friends are playing the very devil with us! Haven't you heard? They've been breaking windows at Marlborough House!" and then he vanished.

Morse had the power of keeping cool in an emergency. He did not believe that Masterson, chivalrous though misguided Masterson—notwithstanding his vague plot to overthrow the succession—would sanction any vulgar attempt on Marlborough House. But he did fear that Masterson's socialists might have proved too many for him, and Morse instantly reflected that if any disturbance were threatened, he himself might be of some service as a peacemaker. So he strode at the best of his speed through the covered passages of echoing stone and the open courtyards which lead from the terrace directly into Palace Yard. When he got within sight of Palace Yard he could make out nothing at first but a confused sea of men's furious and maddened faces; he could hear nothing but a storm-wind of yells, curses, shouts, and howls. In another moment he could see plainly enough that the police were striving to make head against a mass of people who had got possession of Palace Yard.

Morse had a quick eye, and could take in things coolly when a critical moment came. He was a little thrown off his balance for an instant when he saw what we may call the first blood drawn. It is a sickening sight that first blood one sees drawn in any manner of conflict, whether it be the blood of one's comrade on a battle-field, or it spouts from a truncheoned head in a street riot, or reddens the black and glossy side of the bull in the arena of Madrid. The first blood Morse then saw drawn was from the face of a policeman whom he knew personally, a civil, quiet, obliging creature, who was struck on the cheek by a sharp and jagged stone. The second blood drawn was by the policeman's truncheon from the skull of the processionist who happened to be nearest to him. Then Morse saw in a moment what had happened. Part of the procession had succeeded in getting into Palace Yard. The police were struggling hard to get the great gates closed against the remainder of the crowd, and the still excluded mob was fighting fiercely to get in. Stones were flying in from the outside; the police were all but swallowed up by the crowd inside. At last they were evidently compelled to fight for their lives, truncheon in hand.

An inspector of police whom Morse knew very well by sight was striving to make his way into the crowd. He saw Morse in passing, and appealed to him.

"Speak to them, Mr. Morse," he cried out. He had to cry out in good earnest in order to be heard above the din of the struggle. "They'll listen to you, perhaps."

Morse caught at the idea. He was standing on the raised pathway which runs along the side of Palace Yard in front of the cloister out of

which the courtyard opens where the Speaker has his official residence. He was lifted, therefore, a little above the level of the crowd. It struck him even in that moment as an odd and whimsical situation for a public man who was supposed to be a possible Prime Minister to have to try to harangue a furious mob within the very precincts of the Imperial Parliament.

"Fellow-countrymen, working-men, friends!" he called out, and his voice rang across the great square, and wakened echoes which gave back his words. "Hear me, I beseech of you—you know I am your friend. Desist from this violence, which can only do harm to you and to any cause you have at heart." Then he stopped. "No use," he said to the police officer; "they are beyond that." In truth his attempt was hopeless. Only the echoes appeared to pay any attention to his words, and the echoes made mockery of them.

Already the police officer was lost in the crowd. He had recognized the futility of eloquence at such a moment.

Morse too plunged into the thick of the crowd, hoping to see some faces he knew and men to whom he was known; hoping to prevail on some leaders of the procession to work for the restoration of discipline and order. He could see the sunlight glittering on the helmets of a cluster of cavalry drawn up on the far side of Parliament Square, and evidently kept in waiting lest worse should come of it; and even in that moment of confusion he could not help admiring the discipline which kept them there unmoved within sight of the struggle between police and people, only to intervene when the civil power could no longer hold head against disorder. Then in an instant he saw Masterson a short distance from him. The chief of the socialists was striving with all his might and main to keep his people from their attack on the police. He was wildly gesticulating, and kept pointing to the three-coloured sash he wore, as to some emblem of order and brotherhood which both sides were bound to recognize. He had lost his hat, and there was a great cut on his temple from which blood was flowing, but of which he did not appear to be conscious. Morse saw a policeman rush at him with uplifted truncheon. The man evidently took Masterson for a wild instigator of force. Morse made a desperate effort to get hold of the policeman's arm and to drag him back. It was too late; it was hopeless. He distinctly heard two dull heavy blows fall on the bare head of the unfortunate leader of the social democrats; and he saw poor Masterson turn a ghastly white in the face, and then sink in the midst of the fighting crowd. Morse forced his way through the crowd by sheer strength, caring nothing for the chance of random blows from either side, and he got to where poor Masterson lay, and tried to lift his head. Even in all the fury of the struggle some of those near recognized Morse, and saw that he was striving to save somebody, and they lent him a willing hand.

Morse took up the lean body of Masterson in his arms, and sternly ordered those around him to make way, that the injured man might be carried into a place of safety. Morse was careful not to mention Mas-

terson's name, or to allow the face of the man he bore in his arms to be seen by the crowd around. He felt that if it were known that the leader of the movement had been already stricken down, the passion for vengeance would render the socialist mass more desperate than before. Some of the policemen who were stationed at the door of the members' entrance to protect it, and whose duty did not as yet bring them into any collision with the crowd, saw that Morse was trying to rescue some one, and made way for him, and would have helped him to carry in his burden. Morse, however, refused to allow any one to bear his poor old friend but himself. His heart was bursting as he bore the now almost senseless body. The long grey floating hair was clotted here and there in thickening blood; the white face looked waxy and almost transparent; death might have already come, so corpse-like was the load that Morse was bearing. The contrast was striking; would have been most striking, indeed, to any one who knew that Morse and Masterson were about the same age—Morse straight, strong, elastic of tread, with the free vigorous movements of manhood's best years; and the thin, wasted, grey, and shrunken old man whom he was carrying so easily in his arms.

Morse strode through the members' entrance, and into the cloak-room; a long narrow room on the right, looking rather like a prison corridor, except for the cloaks and coats and umbrellas of members that hung in the alphabetical order of their owners' names on pegs, surmounted by cards bearing each name in big-written round-hand characters.

"Pile some coats there," Morse said to one of the attendants; "in front of that fire." One or two huge fires were burning cheerily. "Not too near; take any coats—there's mine, just there; lay them down nicely. Yes, that will do. Now help me to stretch him softly there; he is wounded."

"My God! his skull's regular stove in," the attendant said, with a shudder. "What was he a-doing of, Mr. Morse?"

"Trying to preserve order and save human life—that was all," Morse answered grimly.

They laid him gently on the heap of coats. By this time two or three members came in who had seen Morse with his burden; one among them was Mr. Caleb, a skilful little surgeon who had lately been taken with the ambition of a parliamentary career. He had run to the spot to offer his services. He looked at the wounds in Masterson's head; felt his pulse; partly opened his eyelids.

"Bad business," he said decisively. "Nothing to be done, I am afraid, Mr. Morse. Do you know the man?"

"Yes; a dear old friend of mine."

"How on earth did he get into the row?"

"As he got into every misfortune that has come on him," Morse said quietly; "in the general honest thought and common good to all. It's Masterson himself."

They stood beside him silently. Mr. Caleb looked closely into his

face, and was filled with a new and keener interest. The little group was now almost alone; Morse, Mr. Caleb, and the dying man. The increasing noise of the riot had drawn all others away to the more exciting scene outside. Masterson was breathing in a heavy stertorous way. He opened his eyes once or twice, and looked vaguely up; not seeing anything, not hearing anything. Morse knelt beside him.

"Do you know me?" he said, in tones that had unspeakable tenderness in them. "Masterson, my dear old friend!"

The voice did not recall the dying man to consciousness, but it apparently brought with it some memories of the world and the purposes which he was leaving behind. A sort of light came over the pale grey face, and the lips were seen to move, and were evidently striving to give utterance to words. Morse bent down his ear to catch the sound. In a faltering tone, that sounded hollow and far away, Masterson spoke at last. The only words that Morse could make out were these words—

"The first day of liberty!"

Then the mouth and the eyes closed again, and a shudder went through the prostrate body; in another moment all was over.

"The first day of liberty!" said Morse, as he rose from his knees. "Yes; the first day of liberty has set him free."

Mr. Caleb looked up suddenly at Morse, and then looked away. He saw that there were tears in Morse's eyes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"ONE WHO CAN PROVE."

West-End London, when it woke up next morning and had time to get hold of its newspapers and grasp the full meaning of the columns of news under big startling lines of heading, became stupefied by the reality of the events now brought clearly and fully to its knowledge. It was something bewildering to a quiet man who had lived in London all his life and never known of anything happening there more startling than a murder at the East-End, or a fog, or a great unexpected snowstorm, to find St. James's Street a scene of desolation, and to learn that there had been a terrible riot of something like a revolutionary character in the very precincts of the Houses of Parliament; that Palace Yard had been stormed by an armed mob; that the police had to fight for their very lives; that the troops had been called out; that blood had been shed lavishly; that many of the rioters had been killed or wounded, and that their leader, a well-known popular demagogue, lay dead. These things one read of in histories of the time of the Georges. One had read of Porteous riots in Edinburgh, and one took it for granted that there should be revolutionary commotion in all manner of continental cities and frequent disturbances in the rowdy quarters of New York. But who expected a real riot and shedding of

blood in London? The Hyde Park riots of 1866 amounted, of course, to nothing more than a rough piece of pleasantry and horse-play on the part of a comparatively harmless mob. But the morning papers now, with their headings in huge capitals, "Fearful riots. Clubs and shops stoned and wrecked. Marlborough House attacked. The troops called out. Many lives lost. Mr. Masterson killed!" and other such attractive and horrifying announcements brought home to the peaceful Londoner's mind the fact that the wild-beast temper in man is not to be softened and smoothed out of him by any manner of civilization.

Every policeman who kept his wits about him testified to the same effect as to the beginning of the riot. A large part of the procession had been allowed to enter Palace Yard. Then, as the crowd seemed likely to fill the whole place, the order was given to close the gates. Thereupon the police declared that certain ringleaders, foreigners in appearance, had cried out that the way must be forced and the building captured, and that these men had pulled out revolvers and daggers, and exhorted their followers to do the like. Some of them did succeed in forcing their way in before the gates could be closed against them; and stones were thrown in showers and revolvers were discharged. Then the police, believing very naturally that the whole movement was an organized attack upon the Houses of Parliament, felt bound to fight it out in the best way they could. The first result was that the poor "apostle of affliction," the sworn friend of the working-man and the *prolétaire*, the sworn enemy of the aristocrat and the capitalist, the sincerest of dreamers, the purest of fanatics, was lying dead in the cloak-room of the House of Commons, all his dreams knocked out of him by a mistaken blow from a policeman's baton.

So much for the past; but what about the future? This was the question which London society, and all the propertied, trading, and shopkeeping classes of London kept asking for anxious hours. Is it all over; or was yesterday's riot but an affair of pickets and outposts, preliminary to a great revolutionary and anarchic movement—a nihilism of the London garrets and slums? There was deep and widespread anxiety throughout the day. Seldom, indeed, does any public event stamp itself for many hours on the outer aspect of London life. This time the faces of men in the streets bore visible impress of the calamity which had happened, and terrible expectation of other calamities yet to come. The streets were patrolled by troops. The police were vindictive. Prisoners were being brought up at the police courts hourly, and committed for trial. Inquests were taking place at various hospitals.

Happily it soon became evident that there was no further cause for alarm. There was no common desire amongst any considerable part of the population to create fresh disturbances. There was no really revolutionary organization having for its object the overthrow of any settled institutions. There was no watchword of social revolution. Cool-headed magistrates, police officials, and others, found that the

more they looked into the actual facts, the less and less evidence could they discover of anything like a widespread conspiracy or arrangement of any sort to bring about yesterday's catastrophe. What they did find, and became more and more convinced of every hour, was that the occasion had been deliberately turned to account by a small band of hired agents for the purpose of getting up a formidable disturbance.

Long before the evening had fallen in a clue had been found to an undoubted conspiracy of this kind; and the impression on the minds of those who knew all that was to be known, became stronger and stronger that foreign money and foreign agency had been largely employed to hire professional miscreants, and to force on a serious conflict between the populace and the authorities. Such a disturbance happening on the very verge of a threatened war could not but discredit and damage the English Government and England herself in the eyes of all foreign States, and that undoubtedly was the effect which the disturbance was intended to have. The conclusion was easily arrived at. The foreign money employed was the money of the State with which England was about to go to war. The money was spent that England might be stabbed in the back at a moment of peculiar gravity and danger.

While London was in this state of anxiety, commotion, and trepidation, a fresh surprise and shock was produced by a letter which appeared in the *Piccadilly Gazette*. The letter was printed in large type, and was signed, "One who can Prove." This was what the "one" undertook to prove: "I tell the English Government and the English people that yesterday's riot was got up in the interest of a foreign State by persons who spent foreign money to promote it. I further tell the English Government and the English people that the real head of the conspiracy, through which the foreign money was spent in order that English blood might be spilt and England herself weakened at a terrible crisis, is the leader of the Radical and the peace party, the Right Honourable Sandham Morse, M.P., whom Radicals and lovers of peace have long been designating as the coming Prime Minister of England."

London was much startled by this letter; did not indeed quite believe it; but was too much shaken in all its established ideas to disbelieve anything very strongly. In the clubs, men said, "It can't be true; of course Morse will contradict it." But the papers came out next day, and there was no contradiction from Morse. The "One who can Prove" returned to the charge. He repeated in the *Piccadilly Gazette* the precise accusation he had made, and he challenged contradiction. He added a fresh assertion. He insisted that there was, or had been, an organization under Masterson to set aside the succession on the death of the reigning sovereign, and to establish a republic in England, and that this organization was patronized and supported by the Right Honourable Sandham Morse. "Let him deny it," the letter concluded, "if he can; if he dare!"

Still there came no contradiction from Morse, and at last there

appeared in all the morning papers a communicated piece of information, to the effect that Sir Roderick Fathom, M.P., intended that evening to move the adjournment of the House of Commons after question-time in order to call attention to certain statements made in the *Piccadilly Gazette*, and to ask whether the Government had any information to give to the House on the subject. The paragraph significantly added: "It is expected that Mr. Morse, M.P., will be in his place, and will offer some explanation to the House."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"A SCENE IN THE HOUSE."

The House of Commons was crowded in every part. The chamber proper did not give its legitimate occupants seats enough or nearly enough, and members, therefore, swarmed into their galleries at either side. The places assigned to peers, to foreign diplomatists, and to distinguished strangers were every one occupied. Princes looked serenely down from "over the clock;" one or two great authors were happy in having seats secured for them "under the gallery;" the crypt in which ladies are stowed away glistened with silks and velvets, jewellery and flashing eyes.

There were two women in that gallery, far apart from each other, neither aware of the other's presence, to each of whom the rumours of the expected scene were as rumours touching the life or death—nay, more—the honour of her nearest and dearest. Lady Betty, at once timid and desperately courageous, had come to the House with her father to hear and know the worst. She had heard on that day only of the extraordinary charges in the *Piccadilly Gazette*. Her husband she had not seen since the riots. Even had they been together she would have shrunk from questioning him, as she might have shrunk from probing a gaping wound. But to sit still and wait the course of events was an impossibility. She was too keenly strung to be inactive in a crisis. And so she had come in a strange tumult of feeling, half determined to brave it all out, half hoping that her presence side by side with a great Tory peeress—a connection of her own who had an appointment at Court, and under whose immediate protection Lord Germilion had placed her—would shield her from identification with her husband's revolutionary schemes, whatever they might be.

Koorâli was in the gallery too, but she was in a very different mood from Lady Betty. Scorn of the accusations against Morse, unswerving faith in him, the desperate longing of a loving woman to be near him, to see how he would comport himself in the face of his enemies, perhaps a faint subtle hope that he might know she was there, that her sympathy might somehow reach him—all worked within her. She was cold with nervous excitement. As she sat in her place, very

still, her hands clasped tightly together, her eyes bent downwards, she could hear her own heart beating.

Lord Germilion, a small, white-haired old man, with a very erect carriage and his daughter's bright dark eyes, had got a seat among his peers. Lord Forrest, who had hardly ever seen the House of Commons before, came down that evening, and was shown by his son where and how to find a place. Mr. Paulton, the American Minister, was in the Ambassadors' Gallery, side by side with the young Envoy from the great foreign State presumed to be England's enemy, the young Envoy whom Crichton Kenway saw in deep conversation with Morse at Lady Betty's party. In the mysterious caves of Æolus, beneath the flooring, where the process of ventilation is carried on, many stowaways, if one might thus describe various influential and privileged persons, were sheltered, and found that they could hear, with quite surprising clearness, what was going on over their heads.

Morse took his seat on the Opposition side, below the gangway. A low murmur went round the House as he entered. There was no "demonstration;" his own side of the House received him in absolute silence. One or two men leaned out of their places and shook hands with him. He was evidently very unpopular with the Liberal party generally, and the Tories were furious against him. The House was going through its list of questions when Morse came in. How slow and stupid all the questions and answers seemed to the listeners generally, to the ladies in the gallery for instance! How tantalizing the manner in which every questioning member refused to be content with one answer, and persisted in putting further question upon question! How can any one have the face or the heart to interpose with such trumpery matter at such a time? See, there is Mr. Morse getting up and walking deliberately out of the House! Is he really going away for the evening? Will he not return? Are we not to have our scene after all? The thought was positively maddening. It disturbed more than the occupants of the Ladies' Gallery. Through all the galleries and through the House itself ran the wildfire alarm of anticipated disappointment; the dread that the anxious subject was for some reason or other not to be raised, and that the House would in due course proceed, uninterrupted, with its ordinary business.

Then a sudden and a curious change came over the minds of the spectators. A few moments ago every one was longing to have the questions cut short. Now, every one wanted to have that expanded, iterated, multiplied. If the questions were suddenly to collapse, the House might at any moment find itself plunged into its regular routine of business, and once in it could not get out again, and the anticipated "Morse incident" could not happen that evening, and the scene not taking place that evening would probably not take place at all. Besides, how could one count on getting a seat anywhere to-morrow evening? In many a breast, beneath frock coat and bodice alike, the anxiety began to swell to something not far from agony.

A deep sense of relief suddenly passed through the House. Morse

had returned to his place. The expected scene, therefore, was not doomed to go by default. If the Ministerialist who was understood to have taken the matter in hand should persevere in his purpose, there was no reason why the House should be disappointed. Is the Ministerialist in his place? Yes; there he is, Sir Roderick Fathom, a tall, spare, white-whiskered, country gentleman of the highest respectability in his county and in the House, who had hitherto distinguished himself by his unbending Toryism and his unceasing interest in the question of the malt duties and of local taxation.

At length the list of printed questions is exhausted. About a thousand pairs of eyes, many beaming through spectacles, are turned to Sir Roderick Fathom. But, lo! instead of his rising, a leading member of the Opposition on the front bench got up and blandly begged leave to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it was the intention of the Government this session to bring in any bill to deal with the question of the duties on foreign leather. The Chancellor of the Exchequer made answer that the Government were giving the subject their best consideration, and would be in a position to inform the House at a later period. It was yet very early in the session, etc., etc. Questions with which a Government does not particularly care to deal are always in one of two stages. It is too early in the session to do anything with them or it is too late. Anyhow, that is done with; and now for the scene. No; an independent member of the Opposition sitting below the gangway gets up and puts a question about foreign policy and the recent news from the East. This, too, had to be politely evaded. Now, surely, Fathom is going to get up? Not he; a man sitting next to him rises with some other extemporized question; and when he sits down, and the Speaker, previously made aware of what is to come, positively looks towards Sir Roderick Fathom, that gentleman is so closely engaged in conversation with one of the Government whips who has come up behind him, that he almost loses the opportunity at length placed within his reach. But he does spring to his feet before the time has quite gone, and the Speaker, pointing to him, calls out, "Sir Roderick Fathom," and every one, relieved and contented, settles down to listen.

To the ladies in the gallery, or most of them, and to uninitiated male strangers, Sir Roderick's is a queer and a meaningless performance when he does get up. He is heard to mumble something about "urgent public importance," and then he goes up to the table just in front of the Speaker's chair and he deposits a scrap of paper there, and he hurries, or indeed scuttles, back to his place. What he has done is this: he has asked for leave to move that the House do now adjourn in order that he may obtain an opportunity of discussing "a definite matter of urgent public importance." It is one of the pleasant and practical ways of the House of Commons not to do anything directly, or after the fashion which any sane man would adopt of his own accord. Under the new rules of the House, if a man wishes to call attention to some urgent public matter which has suddenly come up and is not set

down for discussion on that particular day, he is not allowed to say out like a rational creature that he wishes to discuss this question, and ask the permission of the House to discuss it. He has to profess a desire for the instant adjournment of the House, which he does not want; which nobody wants or thinks of granting; which he wants least of all, because if he is anxious to have a certain subject debated at once, it is evident that it cannot be debated if the House incontinently breaks up. But if he is allowed to move the adjournment he can, by virtue and favour of that technical motion, bring up the question he wishes to have discussed, and when all has been said that he wants to say or to hear, he can withdraw his motion for the adjournment of the House, and there is an end of the matter. If there be any one of the unsatisfied who does not admire the practical wisdom embodied in this form of proceeding, and who does not see how absolutely necessary it is that a man should pretend to want something he does not want in order to obtain permission to ask for something he does want, then that sceptical creature would in a past age have failed to see the wisdom which inspired the law courts with the invention of John Doe and Richard Roe.

However, in order to get permission to move the adjournment, Sir Roderick has under the rules to obtain the support of not less than forty members. "Not less than forty members," so declares the rule, "shall thereupon rise in their places to support the motion." The Speaker invites the House to subject Sir Roderick and his motion to this test; and the wondering strangers see nearly all the members suddenly jump to their feet and stand up, and after a second or so plump down again. The whole House, or nearly so, wanted the scene and the personal explanation, and therefore it rose pretty much as one man, and then as one man sat down again. Morse himself was one of the first to rise. The Speaker pointed to Sir Roderick Fathom. That suddenly conspicuous personage got up for the third time. And now for the scene at last.

Sir Roderick began by asking whether Her Majesty's Government had any information to offer with regard to a subject which had excited the profoundest public interest. He alluded to certain statements made by a well-known evening journal, containing the gravest and most important charges against a very distinguished member of that honourable House—one who had held a high position in the late Administration; he referred to the right honourable gentleman the member for Whittlestown, whom he saw now in his place; whether the Government could say if the allegations were true, and whether, if so, they had any communication to make to the House as to any steps they intended to take. Then Sir Roderick sat down, glad that his task was over, but flushed with the conviction that the eyes of Europe were on him.

Before any one else could move, Lord Arden leaped to his feet, and begged to ask, in the first instance, whether the honourable baronet who had just sat down had, in accordance with the rules of courtesy

usually adopted in that House, given notice to "my right honourable friend, the member for Whittlestown," of his intention to put such a question. Lord Arden emphasized the words "my right honourable friend." Kooràli remarked this. Her heart leaped to Lord Arden as he stood up, his slight figure looking so manly and dignified, his quiet manner contrasting so effectively with the bright flash in his eyes. Lady Betty, too, felt a thrill of pleasure and relief. Since one of her own people stood by Morse surely there could not be anything really wrong. And he would deny the charge in a moment. She knew he would deny it. She could imagine the glow of indignation which would transfigure his impassive face. She might feel proud of her husband once more.

Lord Arden's phrase was noticed by others, too, who knew that Arden had never professed any particular liking for Morse. Sir Roderick, half rising, said that he had given the usual notice, and Morse assented by saying "Hear, hear!"

Now then, who is to get up next? Morse? Kooràli fully expected to see him spring to his feet. He did not move. The leader of the Government looked across to him, as if to ask him whether he was not about to rise; and, seeing him motionless, got up himself and, amid a breathless silence, began to speak. Kooràli's heart beat; she felt as if all her nerves were strained out of their places. She sat motionless—waiting. The leader of the Government had not much to say. He had not risen at once, he said, because he thought the right honourable gentleman, the member for Whittlestown, might desire to seize the first opportunity of offering some explanation to the House. As he had not yet done so, he, the leader of the Government, could only say that Her Majesty's Ministers had really no information on the subject beyond that which was within the reach of every member of the House. They had seen—of course with amazement and with incredulity—he was bound to say with incredulity—the assertions made and repeated so positively in a certain evening newspaper, but he knew nothing of the matter, and doubtless the right honourable gentleman opposite would be prepared to make a satisfactory statement to the House. For the present the Government had nothing more to say. So he sat down, having blandly made the matter as disagreeable for Morse as he well could do.

A moment's pause, and then Mr. Fontaine rose, having first glanced at Morse, apparently to see whether he was about to get up. Mr. Fontaine was perhaps the only man in the House whom members, impatient for Morse's explanation, would just then have consented to hear. The House would always listen to Mr. Fontaine, in the conviction that whenever he spoke, something odd, original, and amusing was sure to be uttered. Mr. Fontaine was a man of good family, of Huguenot ancestry, and of large private fortune. He might have had a great political career if he were not too indolent for work and too careless of fame. He loved to be amused, and was pleased with any manner of excitement and novelty. He went in for Stock Exchange

speculations now and then, for the sake of the amusement it gave him; to win was interesting, to lose was even more interesting still. He was a man of deep convictions, but he delighted in puzzling dullards, and making serious folk believe that he was only a cynic and a trifler. He had a weakness for every weak cause; and just now he thought Morse in a very dangerous position, and he resolved to come to the rescue. It seemed to him likely enough that Morse might have dabbled a little in democratic conspiracy. Why not? A man of sense and spirit wants to get all he can out of life, and Morse might naturally enough like to experience the sensation of being a nineteenth-century conspirator. Mr. Fontaine thought neither more nor less of him on that account.

Fontaine began his speech in a slow, measured, drawling tone, for a while keeping down almost to a whisper his strong and somewhat harsh voice. He protested, he said, against the public time being taken up with inquiries into what this, that, and the other public man had been doing while he was out of office. He did not know whether the right honourable gentleman, the member for Whittlestown, had dallied with socialistic conspiracy or not, and he really did not care. If he had done so he had only done just what any other man would have done in his place, if he thought he had anything to gain by it. Did Her Majesty's present advisers pretend to say that they had not coquetted with conspiracy when they were out of office and wanted to get in? Was there a really dangerous conspirator in Europe with whom they had not packed cards? There were loud cries of "Oh, oh!" and "Order" from the Ministerial benches, especially at this last expression. "Honourable members seem to be much offended at my words. I wish they would read their Shakespeare a little—those of the Conservative party who can read. ("Oh, oh!") Well, I suppose some of them can read. 'The phrase is Shakespeare's, and not ill-applied.' I am quoting again, Mr. Speaker; quoting from Byron this time. Yes, I say they packed cards again and again with the vilest conspirators in Europe!" Shouts of anger and surprise now came from the Conservative benches—sincere surprise, for it was well known that the present Administration was composed of men who detested all popular movements at home and abroad. "Yes; the vilest conspirators in Europe! There are conspirators with crowns, as well as conspirators without half a crown; there are conspirators against liberty, as well as conspirators against despotism; and the conspirators against liberty are the worst enemies of the human race. There is not a crowned conspirator on the continent of Europe with whom Her Majesty's present advisers have not packed cards; and all the clamour we hear about war is simply got up because one of their confederates has got the better of them. He was clever and they were dull, and he took them in, and now they lose their temper." Various voices interposed with cries of "Question, question." "I am sticking to the question very closely; much more closely than gentlemen on the Treasury bench would like. The question is that the House do now adjourn, and I support the

motion for adjournment on the ground that we are simply wasting time, and showing ourselves to be hypocrites by pretending that we don't make every use we can of conspiracy and conspirators whenever it suits our political ends. I turn my eyes to the Treasury bench, and I see a row of conspirators there. I look to the front bench of Opposition, and I see a rival row of conspirators there, conspirators of a different kind. I look below the gangway, and I see one particular right honourable gentleman singled out to be accused of tampering with conspiracy. I say it is affectation, absurdity, political hypocrisy; and I hope the House will make up its mind either to adjourn at once —*sine die*, I would suggest—or to get on with its business—if it has any business to do."

Mr. Fontaine resumed his seat, having done a good deal to deprive the whole incident of its melodramatic character, and given, as he thought, a chance to Morse of letting the thing drop without a word. The House, however, had no intention of being balked of its explanation.

There were multitudinous cries of "Morse, Morse!"—and Morse, having quietly looked round and satisfied himself that no one else was anxious to interpose, got up and addressed himself to Mr. Speaker. Every eye was turned on him; every ear was strained to hear what he might say. The stillness as he rose was something oppressive. Goethe speaks in a fine line of "darkness with its myriad eyes;" has not silence sometimes its myriad voices which shrill in the pained ears of the listener?

Morse began in a clear, composed tone, audible all over the House. It had not been his intention, he said, to notice anonymous charges made in a newspaper. He was not fond of the practice of defending himself against anything that might be said of him outside the walls of that House. But when a question had been raised in that House he felt bound to answer it or, at least, to say why he could not answer it. There were two charges made against him. One was that he had entered into some plot or organization having for its object to set aside the succession at the close of the present reign in England, and to establish a republic. On that subject he had to say that he had entered into no such plot, and never, until within the last day or two, heard that there was any such organization in existence. The House broke into one unanimous cheer when Morse had finished his sentence. He waited composedly, and then went on: "I have answered that question because I think it entitled to an answer. A man might well be a patriot and a man of honour, and yet dream of establishing a republic in this country." He reared his head slightly as he spoke, and looked round the House. It was said afterwards that there was defiance in the look. The applause turned into an almost general roar of indignation. Morse waited again. The roar deepened and strengthened.

Lady Betty's face grew white. She looked with a horror-stricken expression at her companion, who pressed her hand in sympathy. Lord Germilion, in his corner of the Peers' Gallery groaned under

cover of the roar, and bit his moustache fiercely. If a man is capable of owning himself a republican in the House of Commons itself, may it not be presumed that he is also capable of abetting a conspiracy? Kooràli felt her frame relax under the stress. She shivered with nervous excitement. It is a thrilling sight, even for the unconcerned stranger, to see a resolute man stand up alone against the passionate House of Commons in one of its fierce, ungovernable moods. "Oh, why did he say that?" some voices in the House itself as well as in the Ladies' Gallery were heard to ask. "Why set the House against him?" "True and noble heart," Kooràli thought, "that hides nothing for mere policy, and fears nothing so much as untruth." "They won't listen to another word from him," was the conviction of many an observer. But Morse knew his audience; he knew that the House of Commons would listen, because there was still much curiosity as to the further answers he might have to make. So he began again after a while, and the House, chafing furiously, did not want to lose a word of what he might say, and so choked itself and listened.

"Therefore, Mr. Speaker," he went on, "I have answered the question, and have told the House that although I am in principle a republican, and believe the republican form of government to be well suited for this country"—here there was another outburst of frenzy and noise; Morse waited, and then got his chance again—"I have no hesitation in saying that I never belonged to any organization having for its object any disturbance of the condition of things which thus far seems to be satisfactory to the majority of the English people."

There was some faint applause; there was some grumbling of anger; there were some ironical cheers, as of men who would say, "Indeed, and verily, you are considerate of our ancient institutions."

"The next accusation against me," Morse said, "is of a different order. I am accused, as I understand it, of having employed foreign agents and used the money of an unfriendly foreign State to get up a disturbance in this country which should weaken England on the eve of a struggle with the foreign State which sent the agents and paid the money. Mr. Speaker, I am the representative of an English constituency; as such I am entitled to be considered an English gentleman. I should claim that title all the same were I working with my own hands for daily wages, as some of the most respected and honoured members of this House have done or, perhaps, are still doing; and I have nothing whatever to say about the charge which has been brought against me."

Then Morse paused, and the House drew a deep breath. The House was puzzled. Lord Arden and a few other men called a loud and emphatic "Hear, hear!" But there were murmurs of dissatisfaction, of surprise; there was a want of understanding in the House as to what Morse actually meant. A French assembly would have understood in a moment, and even enemies would have broken out with peals of applause. But the intelligence of the House of Commons is a little stiff in the trigger.

Then suddenly, as though by common consent, the roar broke forth again. The House of Commons, it has been said, has more wisdom than any one member of it. Very likely; but then the House of Commons at times has much less wisdom and far more passion and wrath than any one member of it. Any one member of the House of Commons, were he the dullest or the most light-headed, would have given himself time enough and commanded his temper sufficiently to hear and understand what Morse had to say, provided that one member were Morse's whole audience. But a number of fairly reasonable and orderly men seems, when brought together and packed into a room, to produce a crowd of unreasonable and disorderly brawlers. So it certainly proved on this occasion. The House lost its head. Several hundred throats sent out their furious voices in one roar of passion. Morse stood quietly and waited. Even when speaking he used but little gesture. Now he stood erect and unmoved as a graven image. His face, indeed, had something of the statuesque rigidity of bronze. Once or twice a slight smile was beginning to show itself on the Napoleonic features; and then the rigidity returned. His manner had in it nothing of defiance, nothing even of conflict; he was merely independent and self-sustained. The Speaker several times called for order; but Canute might as well have bidden the sea to still its noise while it was breaking on the beach. The passionate throats could not be restrained. Crichton Kenway, in one of the seats in the gallery, was chuckling with delight; his wife, in the Ladies' Gallery, was burning with shame.

At last the storm subsided. The lull was permitted because several ineffectual attempts on the part of Sir Roderick Fathom to address the House showed that there was more still to stimulate wrath and curiosity. But Sir Roderick, now that he was allowed to get a word in, only half rose from his seat, and taking off his hat asked, "Do I understand the right honourable gentleman to deny the charge?" To do the honest country gentleman justice, he only wished to give Morse a chance of making his denial emphatic and explicit enough for the intelligence of the House of Commons.

Morse, of course, had sat down and put on his hat the moment Sir Roderick interposed. When Sir Roderick's question was finished, he took off his hat, rose to his feet, and answered in the calmest tones—

"Certainly not. To a charge like that I have no answer to make. If any of my countrymen chooses to believe it of me, he is welcome to do so; no word spoken by me shall ever come between him and his belief. I have to thank the House, Mr. Speaker, for the courtesy with which they have listened to the few words I had to say."

The House remained absolutely silent when Morse sat down. It was utterly puzzled. After all, three out of every four members were commonplace respectable gentlemen upon whom any ultra-refinement of sentiment was as much thrown away as the chivalry of Don Quixote upon the honest landlord of the first hostelry he entered. What most men got into their minds was that Morse had distinctly said he did

not deny the accusation, the worst accusation, made against him. The other accusation he did explicitly deny; and so there was an end of that. The House of Commons, to do it justice, always takes a man's word. But why not deny the other charge as well? To the ordinary English country gentleman or the ordinary English bank director, an attempt to set aside the succession and establish a republic in England would be about as heinous a crime as man could possibly commit. The man who would do that would do anything. Why should not such a man take foreign gold to hire assassins to stab England in the back at her time of uttermost danger? One crime was no worse than the other. Why, then, should a man, if he were guiltless of either, deny the one charge and say he would not deny the other? Almost incredible as it may seem, the fact is that the great majority of the House of Commons believed that Morse refused to disavow the worst of the crimes ascribed to him because he felt that he could not disavow it. For the House had simply lost its wits. A day or two after, when the truth became clearly known, the dullest squire or city man wondered how he had failed to understand Morse rightly, and was sorry for the failure, and felt ashamed and penitent. But for the moment there was a misunderstanding, and the majority of members actually roared and howled with fury against Morse, as he rose composedly, and, bowing to the Speaker, left his place and walked down the floor. A little crowd of members who could not find seats on the benches of the House stood below the bar and blocked the way. Morse had to pass through them. Many of them glared fiercely at him, and there were murmurs and grumbles of wrath. Morse blandly apologized for having to crush his way through them. All the time the furious outcry of the majority of the House was ringing in his ears. Suddenly Lord Arden appeared among the little crowd at the bar, and held out his hand.

"My dear Morse, how delighted I am! You said and did just the right thing. Deny a blackguard charge like that, made by some nameless scoundrel? By Jove, I would as soon deny a charge of picking old Roderick Fathom's pocket! I congratulate you. Let the confounded fools there howl as much as they like. They'll be sorry enough when they come to their senses to-morrow."

"They talk of our House of Representatives—our chamber at Washington, you know"—Mr. Paulton said to the young Envoy, his neighbour in the Ambassadors' Gallery, "but I never saw such rowdyism there, nor such a scene as this; nor a whole mob howling at one man because he refuses to degrade himself by denying an outrageous charge."

"That is what your representative government comes to," the Envoy answered blandly. "In my country, that man would be understood and appreciated by his sovereign, and he would not be left to the mercy of that howling mob—to use your expression—which I think is a very appropriate one."

"I am sorry for Mr. Morse," Paulton said. "From what I know of

him I believe in him and I respect him. He ought to go out to the States; we should make much of him there."

"I know him well," the Envoy said. "He is a patriot and a lover of his country. He ought to come out and settle among *us*. He would have a career there; our Emperor knows a great man when he sees him."

"Ah, but yours is a despotism," Mr. Paulton observed, with a smile.

"Call it anything you like; only tell me what you call the sort of thing that has been going on below us for the last few minutes. But, pardon me, you have given it a name. You have called this assembly a howling mob. *Bien*—would you rather have the despotism of a calm wise sovereign or that of a howling mob? For me, I prefer the despot sovereign to the despot mob."

The incident was over. The Speaker called upon the clerk to "proceed to read the orders of the day;" in other words, to go on with the regular and routine business of the sitting. It was getting towards seven o'clock. It was about time to think of going home and dressing for dinner. Members hurried into the library, the reading-room, and the lobbies, to scratch off hasty letters, in order to catch the last post. Strangers got up and lounged away, casting parting looks on the emptying house. The ladies began to stream, a vivacious and chattering crowd, out of their gallery. Kooràli and Lady Betty found themselves side by side, driven together by the stream. Neither had known before that the other was present. They stopped in the lobby for a moment, and looked into each other's eyes and clasped their hands. Their hearts were beating loudly; each could hear the pulsation of her own. Each woman had tears of emotion sparkling in her eyes. It might surely have been supposed by any looker-on that their feelings were in absolute sympathy.

"Dear, dear Lady Betty!" Kooràli exclaimed.

"Oh, Mrs. Kenway! Is it not terrible? You heard——"

"Oh yes, I heard."

"How they all hate him!"

"Yes. What cowards some men are!"

"He did not deny it," Lady Betty said, with a sob.

"Deny it!" Kooràli said with a flush of surprise and anger. "Of course he didn't deny it. Why should he? Imagine Mr. Morse—your husband—stooping to deny a charge like that, made on the faith of some nameless slander!"

Lady Betty looked at her with wonder, in which there was a trace of resentment. "You—don't—believe it?" she asked.

"Believe it!" Kooràli exclaimed. "Oh, my God!"

The exclamation was forced from her by the intensity, the agony of her feelings. The agony was not because of the public attack made upon Morse, or because of any trouble that might come upon his parliamentary career. But the thought that his wife could even for a moment admit in her mind the possibility of such a charge being true, true of such a man, true of her own husband, was terrible to Kooràli.

Why, it might well break even his brave and strong heart if he were to come to know it.

"Oh, Lady Betty," she whispered, in fervent appeal, "if you have allowed such an idea into your mind, pray, pray don't ever let *him* know of it."

She spoke in low agitated tones. At that moment it was impossible to command look or voice. She had caught Lady Betty's hand in hers, and the two women stood close together. Suddenly Kooràli felt the hand wrenched from her own. Lady Betty uttered a little inarticulate cry.

"Oh, but—you—from you," she began, and stopped. She could not put into words the passion, the reproach, the jealousy, the wounded pride which swept over her like a rushing flood. Her vague dread had become a crushing reality. She knew with the most intense conviction that Kooràli loved Morse. Deep in her heart there had lain for some time the fear that Morse loved Kooràli. Her slow imagination ran riot now. In this hour of defeat and disgrace a still worse humiliation was to befall her. She turned her eyes upon the woman preferred to her with one quick scathing flash of indignation. There was in the look more of wrath than of pain. She said not a word. They were parted.

Kooràli hurried away. She had not taken in the full meaning of that strange look. She was thinking of nothing at first but of the appalling fact that Lady Betty evidently believed there was some foundation for the charge against Morse. "She can't love him; she is not capable of loving him," Kooràli said to herself in generous anger. "He has no one—no one—no one to love him. His own wife turns against him." If at this moment another thought should force itself into Kooràli's mind; if for an instant she should allow her heart to say to her, "Oh! if *you* were his wife, how you would have loved him, and trusted him, and clung to him, and cleaved to him at a time like this!" is there any moralist so stern as to find much fault with the fond and faithful Australian woman, gifted with such an unused wealth of affection, tried just then by such strong temptation?

At the entrance in the courtyard, Lady Betty, when she came down all flushed and agitated, found herself seized by her father. He was fearfully excited.

"Come home with me, Betty," he said in shrill tones. "Get into my carriage. Come to your father's house, my child. You never could live with that man again. A daughter of mine can't stay under the same roof with a seditious anarchist and an avowed enemy to his sovereign and his country!"

Lady Betty cast a wild glance at him and then at the place she had left. She was trembling with conflicting emotions. In that backward glance there seemed something of the wife's impulse to face the worst by her husband's side. So Lord Germilion interpreted it. His grasp on her hand tightened. At that instant Lady Betty again saw Kooràli in the thinning crowd—Kooràli, whose eyes met hers with that high

steadfast look which seemed to Lady Betty, in this moment of torture and humiliation, the look of a triumphant rival.

"What shall I do? What can I do?" she asked in a passionate whisper. "He does not love me any more. It is not for *my* opinion that he cares. Everything is changed between us."

"How could it be otherwise? You—my daughter—your instincts—your training, did not fit you to be the wife of such a man as he."

Lord Germilion was intensely moved. The wounded pride, the anger against Morse, the deep tenderness for her which showed in his face were in a strange contradictory way a stimulant and a comfort to Lady Betty. Here she was understood and prized. She was justified in her own sight. Here was a haven, a strong arm of support. Only the stress of great emotion could have made her confess, even to her father, that she had lost her husband's love. But now it seemed to her that these two—father and daughter, of the same race and order, stricken in like manner—must needs cling to and uphold each other. She had always been more or less pliable in his hands. She had always followed his advice and leaned on his judgment. She suffered him to lead her to his carriage—her own was in waiting, but Lord Germilion waved the footman away. There was no time for argument, nor was Lady Betty capable of it. Her mind was in too great a tumult. She had, indeed, a frenzied longing that Morse should know at once to what he had brought himself and her. He should see that the people she belonged to would not allow her to be outraged, but would protect their own. She got into the carriage. There was a little delay. Lord Germilion gave the order to his house—not to hers. Lady Betty leaned back and burst into a flood of tears. He tenderly pressed her hands.

"Your place is with me," he said. "Your husband must clear himself of this shameful accusation and show that he has no part in treason and conspiracy before he ventures to claim his wife from her father."

Just then Lord Arden came to the carriage window. He had hurried round to the entrance of the Ladies' Gallery to speak to Lady Betty and Koorâli. He had seen the agitation of Lady Betty, and he had heard some of the words spoken by Lord Germilion. He knew that the movement was critical, and that if Lady Betty left her husband now she might all her life regret the step. He pressed forward.

"Lady Betty," he exclaimed, "I want to speak to you. I shall find you at home later?"

"No," Lord Germilion interrupted harshly. "Lady Betty is going to my house. She will not return to her own yet—not till all this matter is cleared—if it can be cleared. My daughter is not a republican. She will not have any dealings with anarchists who plot against their sovereign and their country."

Arden burst into an angry laugh. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "You don't believe that? Oh, Lady Betty," he cried imploringly, "surely, surely——"

But his voice was lost. The horses made a movement forward as the block gave way, and Lord Germilion, annoyed at the remonstrance and anxious to spare his daughter, gave the order to drive on.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CRICHTON'S REVENGE.

At the door of the Ladies' Gallery Kooràli found Kenway waiting for her. There was a glitter in his eyes which it hurt her to see. His face was flushed. There was something strange and inexpressibly distasteful to her in his look and manner. As he came near her and drew her rather roughly out of the crowd towards the carriage, she noticed about him a sickly smell of spirits—which, indeed, she had remarked more than once of late. Kenway, fairly abstemious when the world was going well with him, occasionally allowed his coarser tendencies to get the better of him when he was troubled and, as he expressed it, "down on his luck." Just now, however, he seemed in exultation. He said nothing until they were in the brougham, driving homeward.

"Well, there has been a jolly row downstairs," was his first remark.

Kooràli was too much taken up with her own emotions to notice the form of his comment. She felt so strongly that words seemed forced from her; she had to speak even to him.

"Crichton," she said in a kind of awe-stricken tone, "do you know —would you ever imagine it?—I think Lady Betty Morse believes that shocking calumny against her husband. Yes; I am afraid she does. She almost said so!"

"Does she, really? By Jove, I shouldn't have expected *that!* I am devilish glad to hear it. How like a man's wife—to believe anything against her husband! I *am* so glad. Well, Kooràli, I think I have had my turn out of him—and out of you too, old girl! I have made your friend Morse sit up a bit. I told you I would have my revenge; and I have had it! He'll never get over this. He has had his day; this is *my* day."

Kooràli turned cold all over. She felt her flesh creep. She stared at her chuckling husband.

"Your day—your revenge? Crichton! what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. I have had my revenge."

Kooràli did not answer him or say another word while they were driving home. She remained in silence, not even looking at him. She had a perception somehow that his eyes were fixed on her, and that he was enjoying what he conceived to be a triumph over her. She gazed steadfastly out of the carriage window as they were driven through the lighted streets. A light shower of snow had begun to fall, and the air was piercingly cold. It was the first snow of the winter—the first snow Kooràli had ever seen; but there was very little of it

yet. Let her live as long as she may she will never forget that short drive home; nor the look of their house as they came to it; nor Kenway's manner of formal and put-on politeness as he offered to help her out of the carriage. She ran upstairs swiftly before him. They were engaged to dine out this evening; and it was getting late already. She went into the sitting-room.

"About time to dress, Kooràli," Crichton said, pausing at the door of the room. "Look at the clock."

His strange manner, so composed and yet so malignant, gave her a miserable feeling of dread and absolute insecurity. And yet she had the instinct of battle; she seemed to know that the crisis of her fate had come, and that after this there could be no half-measures. She had an impulse to denounce him as traitor and liar. But the very strength of her suspicion horrified her. She clung to the last shred of faith.

"Crichton," she said, turning to him, "Crichton—my husband"—she seemed to use these words for her own sake, to herself, to remind her that after all he was her husband, and was entitled to at least a chance of clearing himself in her mind—"is there any real meaning in what you said? Have you anything to do with this attack on Mr. Morse? Do you know anything about it? Oh, you don't; I am sure you don't! Tell me!"

He came into the room as she spoke, and closed the door behind him. A bright fire was burning on the hearth. He went towards it, and stood facing her.

"Of course I know all about it. The whole thing is my doing. I don't mind your knowing it; not one bit. I would rather you did know it; and at once. It will teach you, Kooràli, that I am a man of my word; it will let you know that I am not a person to be played with or fooled. I mean what I say, and when I threaten, I strike. That's about it."

"But I don't understand," Kooràli said, with a stony calmness that might have surprised herself. "What have you to do with it? What have you done? Please, Crichton, tell me in plain words. I am very stupid—you have often said so—I can't guess things or explain mysterious hints. What have you done?"

"I'll make it plain enough," he answered with a laugh. "It was I who supplied the information to the *Piccadilly Gazette*; it was I who wrote the letters; it was I who persuaded the editor to back them up. Alone I did it, Kooràli. That was my revenge!"

"Revenge!" she cried. "For what? Crichton, do you mean that it was you who made this charge against Mr. Morse; against our benefactor; against our one only friend?"

"Benefactor be hanged! He hasn't been much of a benefactor to me. He kept me hanging on in expectation until I am pretty well ruined; and then he throws up the whole thing, and forces on me this Farnesia appointment, which I hate. I don't know how far he has been a benefactor to you. You know your own affairs best, I suppose. I speak for myself."

"It was you who got up this charge against Mr. Morse?" she asked again.

"Why, certainly. Haven't I told you that it was my revenge? It would never have been heard of but for me. I have been pipe-laying, as the Americans say, for it this long time. I began keeping an eye on your friend's movements long ago, thinking it might be well to find out something—to have something in readiness. The very first night that we dined at his house, I followed your immaculate hero to a meeting of socialists and foreign spies. I waited outside the house, and saw him walk away. I spotted him in the company of those very men who provoked the riots."

"Do you believe the story—yourself?"

"Why not? Why shouldn't it be true? You heard what he said. You didn't hear him deny it, did you?"

"If some one were to accuse you of forging a cheque or swindling, would you deny it, Crichton?"

"Of course I should. All the more loudly and readily, I dare say, if the charge happened to be true."

"Well, I asked you a question, Crichton. Do you believe the story?"

"That doesn't matter. The House of Commons believed it; the country believes it."

"Again, Crichton"—and she looked him fixedly in the face, the pupils of her eyes enlarging and contracting with intense emotion—"do you believe it—yourself?"

"Well, if you put it that way, I don't think I do. But what about that? Any stick will do, you know, to beat a dog.'

"You *know* it isn't true."

"Yes; I suppose so. I fancy it isn't true. But it will smash him for the moment."

"For the moment, perhaps. But do you suppose there will not be a revulsion? Do you suppose that the country will not soon do him justice? Your revenge will not be a very lasting one, Crichton. But no matter"—she moved back a step or two, and let her arms fall with a gesture of passionate disgust as if she would shake herself free of defilement—"you have done a thing which has settled the question for ever between you and me."

"What do you mean?" he asked savagely, and he came close to her, so close that she could again notice the fumes of brandy in his breath. He had been drinking at intervals all day—not enough to cloud his brain, but enough to make him no longer master of himself. There was a fiery gleam in his eyes, and his voice was rough and harsh.

"You have committed a crime as great almost as any that a man could commit. I had rather hear you confess you had done a murder. You—an English gentleman!" she said, in cold measured tones which fell like drops of ice-water. "You—followed a man whose guest you had been, who had none but kindly feelings to you and yours, and

spied upon his secrets, meaning to turn them as a weapon against him. And then you met him day after day, and took his hand, and pretended to be his friend; and would have set your wife to buy favours from him!"

All the time that she was speaking, her eyes, clear, dilated, and full of unutterable contempt, met his straight. A spirit of defiance, of scorn, of hatred, had risen within her and taken possession of her soul. She was completely adrift from her moorings. She cared not what might happen to her. Her words goaded him to fury.

"By God!" he exclaimed, "I believed you an honest woman till now, and now I know that you are Sandham Morse's mistress."

Koorâli shrank back, putting up her hand with a quick gesture, as if she had been stabbed. Her face was white as death, her very lips blanched.

"Deny it," Crichton exclaimed, with a laugh which seemed to her like that of a fiend or a madman, "you cannot."

In an instant she recovered herself, and faced him again, her small form reared, her head erect, and her eyes wide and glistening, not blenching before his. She let her arms fall again, and they hung straight at her sides. Something in her attitude and expression reminded him of Morse's look when he silently faced his accusers in the House.

"I see," he said, with another coarse laugh, "you take pattern from your lover."

"I do," she answered steadily, not lowering her gaze. "I will not deny such a charge."

Crichton sprang forward and seized her arms. He uttered a low, deep oath.

"If you look at me like that," he said, "I'll turn you into the street."

At that moment Koorâli was hardly conscious of Crichton's grasp, or of any strong feeling on her own part. She had no vivid conception of the situation. Sensation was numbed, and for the time she had lost her reasoning faculty. Even her maternal instinct was in abeyance. She was at the white heat of emotion. She seemed to know only that some influence stronger than her own will was framing the words in her mouth, and forcing her to utter all that had been pent up during years of wretchedness and self-repression.

"Yes," she said, "put me out of your house. Strike me, if you please. I am not afraid of you, now that I know what you are—a coward, a spy, and a liar."

For a few seconds there was a breathless pause, like that which in an encounter with a beast of prey may precede the fatal spring. Koorâli felt the grasp on her arms tighten as if they were in a vice. She thought they were being broken. Her eyes clung with a horrible fascination to his face. Everything swam before her. She saw nothing but those fierce reddened eyes gleaming with rage and hate. She thought for an instant that he would kill her.

Suddenly the hold relaxed completely. Her arms fell nerveless. Crichton moved back a step or two. She staggered. A sensation of giddiness and deadly sickness came over her. She did not know whether she had fainted or not. Everything was dark for a moment. When she became conscious again she was leaning against the grand piano; and there flashed through her memory an odd, inconsequent vision of Morse as he had leaned over the instrument and had watched her while she put together the bulrushes and daisies. And then she seemed to hear the breeze rustling the reeds on the bank of the river Lynde; and with a swift sharp pang she felt the conviction that she would never again see the sunset—the old gods transformed into evening clouds, as Morse once told her Heine had called them—floating across the meadows at the Grey Manor.

Presently she knew that Crichton was speaking. He was standing now away from her, and almost as quiet as herself. He looked no longer violent, but only hard and sinister and resolute. His self-conquest gave him a sort of dignity that deepened in Koorâli's mind the sense of irrevocableness. There had been said and done that which could never be unsaid and undone. His very recognition of this fact, which she saw in his face, lifted him in her estimation to a higher level. He seemed something more than a cowardly cur.

"You're a woman," he said, "and I can't strike you. I can't put you out of my house into the night. But I'll not sleep under the same roof with you again."

It had come—the release! For the moment, it was as if there had been an inrush of pure air and glorious sunlight—and then black terror like the falling of the stone upon the mouth of a tomb. She straightened herself a little and bent forward with parted lips. The anxious questioning in her gaze sharpened to agony.

"I may go," she said; then paused. "And the children?"

"You may go—where you please. To Morse, or to your father. The children will stay with me. I do not know yet what I shall do with them. Probably send them both to a strict school, where they will be well brought up."

"You *cannot* put me out of your home," cried Koorâli. "You cannot part me from my children. The law would defend me."

"The law does not forbid a father to send his boys to school," replied Crichton coldly. "The law, I believe, may, under certain conditions, compel what is called a restitution of conjugal rights. You have that alternative."

Koorâli uttered one low cry and was silent. She had the impulse of a mother whose actions have unjustly condemned her children to death, and who will save them at any cost. Her resolution was taken.

"I am willing to come to any reasonable arrangement about money," said Crichton. "In the meantime, you will require some, whatever your plans may be. You will find here rather more than is needed for your passage to Australia." He took out a pocket-book as he spoke, and opening it, divided a bundle of bank-notes, half of which

he handed to her. "It's only right," he added, with that horrible laugh, "that you should have your share of the plunder. This is the price which the *Piccadilly Gazette* gave for—my information."

Courage flamed in her. She came forward and took the bundle from his hand. She moved back a little, then before his eyes deliberately tore the notes across, then across again, and flung the pieces on the floor.

He made a gesture as if he would have fell upon her and throttled her there and then; but again by a violent effort he restrained himself, and abruptly turning he went out of the room, leaving her standing there with the shreds of the bank-notes scattered round her.

She remained in a dazed way, incoherently thinking. Exactly at eight o'clock she heard Kenway leave the house to go to his dinner-party. She could picture him to herself entering the drawing-room of the house where he was to dine, advancing all smiles and grace to his hostess, and making some sweet apologetic explanation of dearest Koorâli's absence, and conveying the expression of her regrets, and regards, and loves, and so forth. Koorâli could not help letting her thoughts wander in this idle way and painting for herself this unimportant little picture. When he was gone, she dragged herself upstairs, still physically weak, and too bewildered quite to realize what had happened. Her boys' voices in the nursery seemed to call her there. They were amusing themselves alone. Lance was tinkering up a battered steam-engine, and Miles was spelling out a nursery rhyme from one of his toy-books—

> "*A carrion crow sat on an oak,*
> *Derry, derry, derry, decco;*
> *A carrion crow sat on an oak,*
> *Watching a tailor shaping his cloak,*
> *Heigh ho! the carrion crow, Derry, derry, derry, decco.*"

Koorâli stood for a minute in the doorway and looked at her children. All the tragedy of the situation rushed over her in strange contrast with this homely little scene. An exclamation like a groan broke from her. The boys looked up and saw her standing there, still in her street dress.

"Mother," said Lance, "aren't you going to the party with father?"

"No," she answered. "I'm going to stay—with my children."

Something in her voice startled both the boys. Lance put down his steam-engine, and Miles crept up to her, his book in his hand.

"Mayn't we come down, then, mother, to the drawing-room? No one will come to undress us for ever so long yet."

"We will stay here," said Koorâli. Suddenly she began to see, from their wondering faces, that her look and tone were giving them the impression that something was amiss. She roused herself to a kind of hysterical gaiety and interest in their amusements. First, Lance would have her play at lotto with them, and then Miles begged for one of Grimm's fairy tales.

Kooràli went through the game, and then read, read on mechanically. And all the time her despairing resolve was becoming fixed into an unalterable purpose. She did not know whether Crichton had really meant what he said, and had gone from the house not intending to return till she had left it; but she knew that she meant to take away her children, and to hold them till they were actually wrested from her.

She asked, putting down the book, "Lance, should you like to go back to Australia?"

"Oh, jolly!" cried Lance. "It's ever so much better than Farnesia, I am sure. I say, mother, father showed me some snakes that had come from Farnesia in the Zoo—weenie things, not much bigger than slow-worms. I say, do you know that if you cut a slow-worm in pieces, it'll join together again?"

"If you put one bit in Asia and one in Africa, it wouldn't join," said Miles.

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Lance.

Just then their nurse, who was Kooràli's maid as well, came in, full of concern because her mistress had not gone to dress. The woman guessed that there had been a quarrel. It was not the first time that Kooràli had taken refuge in the nursery after an unpleasant scene with her husband.

"Oh, ma'am!" she exclaimed, "I was afraid you mightn't be well. Shall you dress later?"

"I am not going out this evening," answered Kooràli, commanding her face and voice. "I shan't want you, Amelia."

"If you please, ma'am, cook did not understand that you would be at home, and would like to know if you will require dinner."

"No," answered Kooràli, "I'm not feeling very well, Amelia. I couldn't eat now."

"You're tired, ma'am, and with one of your headaches, I expect. Won't you let me run down for a glass of wine and a biscuit. You do look so pale," the maid urged. She was really attached to her mistress, and distressed at her appearance.

She went away without waiting for permission. Kooràli drank the wine, and ate the food that was brought her. They did her good and revived her faculties. She let Amelia take off her out-of-door things, and then she kissed her children and went downstairs again. She had a great deal to think of and to settle. She could think better now. The drawing-room was just as she had left it, and the torn notes lay still on the floor. She wondered if it was snowing still. She went to the window, and, drawing aside the curtain, looked out into the night. Great flakes like white feathers were falling thickly and noiselessly. The ground was quite white, and so were the roofs and projections of the houses opposite. The trees in a square at the end of the street looked like huge branches of white coral. She had seen such coral growing beneath the ocean away near the Great Barrier Reef. How strange it was! How beautiful! It awed her, and brought the tears

rushing to her eyes. She, who was born in an almost tropical region, had never beheld such a scene. The strangeness, wildness, and weirdness of it seemed in keeping with the crisis in her own life.

The sound of traffic in the streets was muffled, but she could hear the shrill shouting of the newspaper boys, and gathered word by word the shrieked-out announcement, "Great scene in the House of Commons! Serious charge against Mr. Sandham Morse."

She turned hastily from the window, and leaned against the chimney-piece, her head upon her hand, till long after the cry had died away, thinking—thinking. She was indeed perplexed in the extreme. Yet she had got up a sort of marble composure. Her purpose was fixed—was adamant. Nothing on earth should induce her to live with Crichton Kenway as his wife any more: and she would not give up her boys. She was not thinking of giving them up; she was only thinking of how they were to be got away. It came into her mind that Kenway could be easily induced to take what he had himself once called, "a financial view of the situation;" and that he could be bought off: that he would let her take her children if she could give him money for them. But to whom could she turn? She had no money. Her cheeks flamed at the mere idea of turning to Morse. Oh, how gladly he would do it, she knew, if she could only turn to him—and she could not. Any man on earth rather than him—after what Crichton had said; and after Crichton's crime against him. The clock struck nine.

She heard the bell at the street-door ring. Who could be coming at that hour?

CHAPTER XXXV.

"NO WAY BUT THIS!"

"Mr. Morse."

Koorâli stood motionless with the shock of surprise. He of all men was the last whom she could have expected to see. She looked at him with a sort of terror in her eyes. Her greeting was one of absolute silence. Nor, for a moment, did he speak. The door closed again. He came straight to where she stood, but he did not hold out his hand.

"Koorâli!" He had never called her by her name since the day, too well remembered, on the terrace at the Priory-on-the-Water. "Koorâli, are you shocked at my coming so late? I felt that I must come; I have news to tell you. But stop! I see by your face that you have news to tell me; I see it in your eyes, and in those tell-tale half-circles round them. Something bad has happened to you too. Well, I will first have your story, and then you shall have mine. May I sit down?"

He drew a chair and sat down. His forced composure, his manner

of assumed levity, were ominous and terrible to her. His face was kept rigid as a mask; but his eyes spoke of some grim event which he was compelling himself to endure.

"Tell me first," Kooràli said tremulously.

"No; I must first hear what you have to tell me. Go on. Something has happened. What is it?" There was a touch of almost tragic imperiousness about him which mastered her. It was bewildering, tempting, and yet inexpressibly sweet to see him so near, with his eyes fixed upon her, and something in them which had never been there before. "Sit down," he said; "we have a great deal to talk about—you and I." She moved from where she had been standing by the mantel-piece, and sat down on a low sort of ottoman in front of the nearly burnt out fire. As she did so, her dress brushed the little sheaf of crisp paper on the carpet. She saw his eyes attracted to it by the rustle, and stooping, suddenly gathered up the torn notes, and with a passionate gesture flung them upon the coals. "Those are bank-notes," he said, still in that abrupt way. "Why do you want to burn them?"

"Because they are the price"—she began impetuously, with heightening colour, and then stopped, drawing herself together with a little shiver, while a curtain seemed to fall over her flashing eyes and moved features—"because my husband gave them to me," she said in a tone of repressed bitterness.

At that instant the pieces of paper flamed up. The glow striking her face or the momentary change in its expression made him start forward and look at her searchingly.

"You have been ill," he exclaimed. "Oh, how altered you are!"

He had not seen her, except upon that dusky afternoon in the Park, since they had parted so conventionally at the Priory-on-the-Water. As she sat there in her black dress, it seemed to him that her form was shrunken; that her cheeks were more wasted than he had fancied on first entering; and that the circles round her eyes were larger and hollower.

"I've not been ill," she said, in a manner of the deepest dejection; and then, looking up at him with a quick, most pathetic glance, she added, "I've only been—unhappy."

He made a sound like a groan. "Unhappy! These months! I knew it. And I couldn't do anything. No matter now. Tell me what that means," and he pointed to the blackened paper. "You have quarrelled with your husband?"

"We have quarrelled," Kooràli answered quietly. "He is sending me away from him—for ever. I shall never live with him again."

A melancholy smile passed for half an instant across Morse's face, and then was gone. He was thinking, "Is it much of a banishment for such a woman to be sent from such a man?" The smile gave place to a peculiar expression. He bent towards her. "Then, Kooràli," he said, in a strange, low voice, "you are free to go where you will."

No covert meaning in his words struck her.

"My children," she went on simply, "my little boys. He says I must not take them; but I *will* take them."

"Do you really mean that your husband is turning you out of his house?" Morse asked fiercely.

"I do. He has turned me out of his house; he has told me that I must go; that I must be gone before he returns; that he will not come under one roof with me ever again. See"—she made a gesture towards the fire—"there is the money which he gave me, that I might go away."

"Where do you propose to go to, Koorali?" Morse leaned forward, his chin buried in his hands, his elbows on his knees, and he gazed fixedly, anxiously, into her face.

"I am going back to my father—in South Britain. I have nowhere else to go to. I must go. I *will* find a way. I *will* take my little boys—nothing shall prevent me from doing that—I *will* do that!"

"Yes," said Morse, "wherever you go your children shall go with you."

"Thank you; oh, thank you!" Koorali exclaimed fervently, as if he had given her some great gift. He had, at least, approved of her resolve. "*He* will be glad in the end," she said. "He is going out to his new government, and he will feel all the happier for being free from us. He has never cared for us. He only said—what he did—about the children to frighten and torture me."

"Tell me—was the quarrel very serious?"

"We can never come together again—never, never! It's all ended. I'd rather die than go on. I——" she faltered from old instinct of reserve, then spoke again recklessly—"I wanted it to end. I tried for a long time to bear all and say nothing; but there came a time when I could bear no more. He made life very bitter to me."

"I know it. I know it, Koorali."

"To-night there was said what can never be forgotten as long as we two live. I am going away to-morrow—I and my children. I will hide them from him till we are out of England, and then—then, if he wants them, he must drag them from me. He won't do that. It would not be worth while."

There was silence for a moment. Then Morse asked—

"Can you tell what it was about?"

She only shook her head, and again there was a moment's silence, and then Morse said—

"If I can guess, will you tell me then; will you say 'yes' or 'no'? Was the quarrel—about me?"

Koorali looked at him in a wild, beseeching way. The faint flush which had come over her face was quite gone now; she was deadly pale. The steadfastness of his gaze seemed to compel a truthful reply.

"Yes." She spoke in a mere whisper the one word. Then she rose and went to the chimney-piece, and took up one of the cards that were

lying there, and turned it over, and read and re-read its inscription, all unconsious of what she was doing.

"He accused you——"

Without looking round, without putting down the card she appeared to be studying, Kooràli answered, "He did."

"My God!" Morse said, with a groan. The purest, truest, most loyal woman he had ever known; and she had to bear all this! This was her reward!

"He doesn't believe it," Morse exclaimed; "he knows what a liar and slanderer he is!"

"He does not believe it," Kooràli said simply. "Oh no; he knows it is not true. He only wants to drive me from him. Do not think altogether hardly of him," she added, impelled by an instinct of justice. "I angered him. I—I—lost myself."

Morse gave a bitter little laugh. "There is something more, Kooràli, I am sure. Something that I do not know," he said with sudden energy.

"There is," Kooràli answered. Her face seemed to grow still paler.

"And am I not to know it?"

"No; not through me. Never, I hope, through any one. It would not be right for me to tell you; you will not ask me?" She turned round to him now with beseeching eyes.

"Still I think I ought to ask you——"

"No, no. Oh, pray don't press me. I could not tell you. It was something told to me which I ought never to tell again. It did not really concern *me*; except that—— No. I must be silent. You will not let me say what I should hate myself for saying?"

Wronged though she was, Kooràli shrank, as from something dishonourable, at the thought of letting Morse know of her husband's unparalleled treachery and ingratitude towards him.

"Well," Morse said, drawing a deep breath, "if it does not concern you, Kooràli, it does not concern me; I shall not ask you any more about it." His impression was that Kooràli had found out some wrong-doing of her husband, something of the too-familiar kind, and that she thought she ought not to tell of it, and he felt that she was right. "Come, you have told me your story. Your husband has left you."

"He has told me I am to leave him for ever."

"Yes. Now, don't you want to hear my story?" He got up as he spoke, and stood grim and Napoleonic before her.

"Yes," Kooràli said, taking new fright at the strange expression on his face.

"Well, it is your own over again—in a different way. My wife has left me."

"Oh no!" Kooràli exclaimed. "Lady Betty left you? It can't be!"

"She has left me, Kooràli; she has gone back to her father's house. She declares she will never come under my roof again—and she is right

in *that*," he added grimly. "She believes that I was really the leader of a plot to stab England in the back with a foreign dagger; by assassins hired with foreign money."

Kooràli broke into a cry of horror and shame. "She believes that—of you—your own wife? She says so? She herself; her very self?"

"She has written it down here; with her own hand. See—you may read her letter. I found it waiting to welcome me when I reached home—I mean the house that was my home." He drew out a crumpled sheet, and held it to her. She did not move her hands to take it. With a bitter laugh he tossed it into the fire. "You teach me a lesson in loyalty," he said. "Well, it's late for that now. Yes;" he broke out wildly, "she believed it! And Arden—the young man I never much liked, and he didn't like me, I know—he didn't believe it for one second! He came out of his way this evening to speak to me and shake hands with me and tell me I had said just the right thing! And his father, Lord Forrest—that cold, stately old man, who would not diverge one inch from the most scrupulous principle to save the empire—he came to me, and held out his hand and he told me I had spoken like a man of honour and a gentleman—and that means so much with him. He did. He was hardly ever in the House of Commons before, and he came to hear me; and he approved of what I had said and done; and said he would have done just the same himself! And you—well, of course, I need not speak of you—you couldn't believe such a tale of me."

He had moved in an excited way while he had been speaking, and now he stood by the piano, and leaned over it in the attitude she remembered so well.

"Oh no," she said quietly. "No matter who believed it, I couldn't believe it; I never thought about it at all—except that you were right in not condescending to deny it. I was almost afraid at first that you were going to give it a serious denial; but, of course, I might have known that you would do just what was right." She remembered then Lady Betty's strange looks and strange words as they were leaving the Ladies' Gallery. Her heart was swelling with generous anger.

"Well, I have said enough about that," Morse declared; and he made a gesture with his hand as if he were waving it away for ever. He left the piano now, and went over to the chimney-piece and stood by Kooràli. "I didn't quite know while I was coming here, Kooràli, what I was coming for. I suppose I followed my star, as you said that Australian morning, long ago—don't you remember? Yes; I must have been following my star! Now it shines on me quite clearly, and it shows me the way. When I came here I did not know that you were without a husband, as I am without a wife. Have we not borne enough? Have we not kept from each other long enough? Kooràli, let us not stand apart any more."

His manner was not in the least like that of a wild lover in a melodrama. He was standing composedly on the hearthrug, and his voice

was low-toned and quiet; his whole bearing that of restraint and reserve. She looked up in wonder to his face. Did she really understand what he meant?

"Come to me, Kooràli," he said; "the fates have thrown us together. Is it not so? Let us go together, or stay together, just as you like. Your children shall be my children; and I will try to make you happy, for all that has come and gone."

Kooràli's eyes were downcast. She stood very still. Only the little tremor which passed over her frame told of the intensity of her feeling.

He watched her with breathless anxiety. "It is to be," he said in quick incisive tones. "You and I look straight into the soul of things. No fine talk—no playing with the conventional scruples. We've been driven out of all that. You trust me? I needn't ask. It's enough. Give me your hand on it."

At his command she lifted her eyes and let them meet his full; but she held her hand back. Her composure was marvellous. It seemed to her that she was pressing down weights of lead on her soaring heart. Had it been only a question of herself, the world might go. She knew her weakness. But she must be strong—for her children—for him.

"My friend, why have you said this? I would give all the world, if it were mine, that you had not said it. I have lost you now—I have lost you for ever!"

"Folly!" Morse said impatiently. "Idle folly. We only take what lies at our feet. Yesterday I felt as you do; but everything has changed to-day—for both of us. What have you got by your purity, and I by my scruples? Your husband accuses you of crime, and turns you out of house and home; and my wife deserts me in the hour of battle! She leaves it for you to fight with me. Ah, *you* can be loyal! Tell me. Did I not do well to you? Did I ever say what I felt about you? Did I ever speak of love to you?"

"Oh no, indeed; you never, never did. You acted like a true friend; and I—yes, I adored you for it." Kooràli let herself go for a moment, and spoke out her heart with a passionate energy.

"Well—and what did we get by that? Did I not encourage you to leave London? Did I not do all I could to help you to get away—and you knew how I felt to you all the time; yes, and I may say it now, I knew how you felt to me—Kooràli?"

"Yes," said Kooràli, still with passion in her voice. "It is all true. I honoured you for it; I do still. I honour you now for your—for——" Her voice broke altogether. After a moment she went on, "Some day, some distant day, I shall own to myself all that I felt to you." For the first time, while they were speaking, the tears came into her eyes. "Oh, don't you know that it is something precious to me—something to treasure up all my life, to make me feel a better woman—the thought that you have cared for me?"

"An exceeding tenderness came into his face. He made a movement towards her, but her very trust was a barrier. He restrained himself.

"And what have we gained by that; what have we got?"

"Gained? Got? My friend"—Kooràli's melancholy earnestness seemed to widen the distance between them—"we have saved our honour and our conscience; we have kept the whiteness of our souls! You, my dearest friend, you who think it nothing to throw away a great career for a principle—you ask me what we have gained, you and I, by keeping the whiteness of our souls?"

"We owe something to ourselves," Morse broke in. "This has been forced upon us; we haven't sought it. Come, Kooràli," he spoke to her very gently now, "there is a crisis sometimes in people's lives which can't be disposed of by reference to the canons of any casuistry. You and I love each other—yes, we may say that now—we are suited to each other; we seem, as the romancists say, made for each other. I think that even on that Australian morning I had some dim perception that you and I were somehow destined to stand side by side, some time. I wish I had never lost sight of you. I am my true self only with you. Come. We need each other. The world has thrust us both outside its doors; let us go together."

"Go where?" Kooràli asked. "Is there any place where I could forget that I had brought dishonour on my boys; or where you could forget that you had brought disgrace on your name and your career—where I could forget that I had helped you to do it? Oh, do take pity on me—you, my only friend; and do not let us speak of this any more!"

"I do take pity on you, and so I take you away from this place where you are insulted, and degraded, and miserable."

"Ah," she pleaded softly, "can a woman ever be really degraded but by herself?"

"Let us go to America," Morse said; "a great career is to be made there by any one who has brains and energy. Kooràli, they shall hear our names in Europe again!"

"And your country, Mr. Morse? Your people?"

"My country,' he said, with a scornful and bitter laugh, "will for aught I know echo the yells of the House of Commons! My people? I am the most unpopular man in England now."

"It is only the madness of a moment," she urged. "Every true heart in England will rally to you; you will stand higher than ever. This will be forgotten."

"It will not be forgotten by me."

"Yes, yes; you will see that the country, the English people, have never for a moment lost faith in you. Why, even in that House of Commons, those whose opinion you cared for were with you——" Kooràli stopped in sudden embarrassment. Morse saw what had made her feel embarrassed.

"And my wife?" he asked. "What about her opinion?"

"Oh, that was some sudden, extraordinary misconception; I know it was. Already, perhaps, Lady Betty understands. One must remember how she has been brought up; and how devoted she is to

the Princess and the Court. Oh, believe me, that wound will be healed. You and Lady Betty will be friends again."

Morse shook his head. "You do not know what it is for a man like me to have it blazoned all over town to-morrow morning that his aristocratic wife has left him for ever, because she believes him to have been an associate in an infamous plot. Only one thing on earth, Kooràli, can make life a good thing to me; and that is your companionship. Come with me. Come! Let us give up all this noisy, empty world of politics, if you like. Let us live in some quiet place and dream."

"A dream, indeed!" said Kooràli sadly.

"Let us watch the sunsets. Let us live in peace and honour—yes, honour; I repeat it. Let us be everything to each other. I know now what you are worth to me, and what the world is worth to both of us; and I shall make myself worth something to you. You shall never be sorry for trusting yourself to me."

"I know it; in that sense—oh, I know it," she said. She clasped her hands on the mantel-board before her and leaned her head upon them. At that moment the dreariness of the struggle came upon her with deeper and sadder meaning. For an instant she allowed herself to drift towards the dreamland he pictured. But in a moment she was facing him again, mournfully resolute. "I know that all that kindness and gentleness and chivalrous affection could do for woman would be done by you for me—to the end," she went on, "to the very end, wherever and whatever that might be. But you could not turn wrong into right or shame into honour. Soon you would be sorry on my account, and I should be sorry on yours. We should end by making each other unhappy, just because we are not bad enough to do wrong and feel no remorse. See what it has come to already," she added plaintively; "I can't even ask your advice in my sad strait."

"I am selfish in this—I know it," Morse said; "but who could help it? Who would not pity you and love you that had seen you as I have seen you? I never said so while you had a husband. Now that you have none, Kooràli, I will save you from yourself; I will prevail upon you; I will make you go with me."

His manner was entirely respectful; he did not stand close to her; he did not even take her hand. But there was a strength of emotion in his looks which frightened her, and although his voice was calm, his eyes and his words were wild. Kooràli found the truth forced in upon her that in that crisis she could not rely on his man's strength for a support; that she must think and act for both; that she alone must save herself and him.

"At least," she said, "you will not press me now; this moment? You will not ask me to decide to-night? Oh, you do not know how serious this is for a woman with children—with sons who will one day grow up and know all about their mother. You will give me to-night to think? Ah, indeed—indeed, if I hesitate it is not because of any want of trust in you. But you will not press me—no; not to-night,

my only friend?" She now showed her trust in him so far that she put her hand tenderly into his for a moment. He raised it, touched it softly with his lips, and let it drop again.

"I will come to-morrow. When?" was all he said.

"I will write to you," Kooràli answered. "Do not try to see me till you have my letter."

They parted without another word. Her eyes followed him as he moved to the door. It was well that he did not see the anguish in them. It was well that he did not hear the low cry which broke from her when the door shut behind him, and she was left alone.

She heard him go downstairs. She heard his step in the hall below. He trod firmly and lightly, she thought; there seemed to be even something of elasticity and elation in the tread. Perhaps she had made him hopeful for the moment: perhaps he was thinking of a new life to be begun by him and her together. She heard the door open and then close. It closed, not with a clang, but gently, as if in that very moment he were tender of her nerves and her feelings.

At the sound she flew to the window, and, drawing aside the curtain, slipped out on to the little balcony. She watched him as he walked down the street, silently, like a ghost. The snow had ceased falling now, but everything was covered as with a sheet. The lamps cast a bluish light upon the pavement. She watched him disappear in the shadow of a church at the corner of the square. It was a saint's day: there was service going on within, and the sound of the organ came to her and seemed to solemnize the decision she had made. The devotional strains and the tall dark building, with its snow-flecked spire and all its Gothic arches and projections traced in dazzling white, gave her a feeling of stay and anchorage. At best or at worst, how short and poor was life! how great God's goodness! how vast the Infinite!

She went back again and closed the window. The air felt very cold. It had made her shiver. She sat down miserably on the sofa, and then hid her face in the pillows and broke into unrestrained tears: for she knew that she was not to see him any more.

When she had for the moment no more tears to shed, she crept upstairs to the room where her boys were sleeping, and she knelt beside them and prayed. Her mind was made up: she knew what she had to do. Not for one instant did she doubt as to the path she was to tread. She was to save *him*, and her boys, and herself. But she prayed for guidance as to the manner in which this was to be done, and for strength to bear up and to do it. Truly, if one but sincerely wishes to walk the right way, "light ariseth in the darkness" and the path is seen.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

KOORÀLI'S LETTER.

CREIGHTON did not come home that night. He did not come home the next morning. Almost the first news that Kooràli heard on waking was that one of the servants had received a message from him ordering that his letters should be sent to the Grey Manor.

Kooràli slept late, and started up with a sense of guilt and dread in the bright light of a frosty morning. There was so much to do. She could not see her way in front of her. She must go away that very day—before Morse could come to her. She must steal her children, and hide herself and them, before there was time for her purpose to dawn upon Creighton's mind. But how? Where? She had no money. She had no friends—none at least to whom she could apply in such emergency. In her bewilderment she could only think of Zen. She would have died rather than be indebted to one of the family; but Zen, somehow, was not one of the family—honest, impulsive Zen, who, on her own part, had some experience of suffering. Kooràli resolved to seek assistance from Zen. But, again, how? Of Zen's generosity and loyalty she felt assured; but how could her plans be kept secret from Eustace, and would not that involve their betrayal to Creighton? How could she write or telegraph to Zen without the risk of endangering her own and her children's liberty?

Two letters were brought to her. The handwriting of one seemed familiar and yet strange. She opened the other, of which she knew the superscription too well—too well.

"I will come for you, Kooràli, to-morrow at five o'clock. We will take the boys with us. I think of going to Dover by an ordinary train. We shall leave England at once, either for Calais or Ostend. Where to go next I have not thought; but we can settle that after. For the present it is best to have no plans. Trust yourself and your boys and your future to me, as I trust all to you.

"For ever yours,

"S. M."

She kissed the letter tenderly and put it in her bosom. "I may do *that*," she said. With it pressed thus to her heart she could have dreamed herself into Paradise. But there must be no dreams.

She dressed in a mechanical way, and as mechanically submitted to her maid's last touches. Amelia's curiosity was rampant when her mistress said, "I am going to take the children away for a while. Have their clothes packed as soon as possible."

"Shall you take me, ma'am?" asked the maid.

"I don't know. No," answered Kooràli absently.

"And your own things, ma'am?" pursued Amelia. "Will there be any evening dresses required?"

Koorâli gave her directions calmly and minutely. Oh, the mockery of such details! It was not till she was alone again that she recollected the other letter she had received. As she looked at it once more, it flashed across her that the writing was Lord Arden's; and then she remembered, with the sudden sense of a saving hand stretched out to her in her need, their conversation at the Priory-on-the-Water, and the promise she had made him. She hastily opened the letter. It ran—

"Forrest House. Tuesday, Midnight.

"Dear Mrs. Kenway,

"I was in the House this afternoon, and I saw you and tried to get at you as you were leaving the Ladies' Gallery, but there was a crush, and I lost you. I want very much to speak to you, though I know, of course, what your opinion is of the infamous charge every one is talking about. You must feel as keenly as I do the fact that Lady Betty Morse has forsaken her husband in his trouble. It must not be. We, who are friends of both, must not let it be. I fear that Morse, in a moment of disgust, may throw up his political career. We know that in a little while—a few days, perhaps—the country will do him justice; England cannot spare such a man; he must be saved to her.

"May I come to you about midday to-morrow? If I get no telegram to the contrary, I shall be at your house, and, as always, at your full service.

"I am, your faithful friend,

"Arden."

There was something in the tone of Arden's letter which brought the blood rushing to Koorâli's cheeks. Had he seen Morse? Did he guess the truth? Why did he take it for granted that she knew of Lady Betty's departure? Why did he call upon her to mediate between husband and wife? Why did he appeal to her to save to the people the statesman who could lead them to honour? The very way in which he subscribed himself suggested that he fancied the time had come in which she might redeem her promise, and in which he might be able to help her.

These questions revolved in her mind while she went over her papers, and, as methodically as she could, made preparations for her departure. She did not telegraph to Arden. Of course she would see him. She could not help looking to him in some sort of undefined way for aid in this emergency. She did not know how he could help her, unless in seeking out Zen—this was the one plan which took shape in her thoughts. She did not even know what she should say to him. She could not make up her mind to tell him in plain words that she had quarrelled hopelessly with her husband and that she meant to steal away her children; but it seemed to her, looking back now, that he had all along been destined to come to her assistance.

It seemed to her, as she pondered in a confused way, mixing up present and past, that when they had talked together at the Priory and he had asked if he might be her friend, she had foreseen this trouble, then dim and shapeless in the future, and for that very reason had hesitated to take him at his word. She had felt, then, that she could not lightly give a promise which some day might mean a great deal.

At a little after twelve Arden came. He was shown into the front drawing-room. She was in the back room, with the door between closed. Presently she came in to him. As she pushed aside the *portiere*, and advanced, a little wasted figure in a black dress, with pale and resolute face and deep sad eyes, all his previous suspicions were confirmed, and he saw that something momentous had happened to her.

She shook hands with him, but did not sit down. The room seemed cold and cheerless, and the fire was unlighted. Arden looked a little awkward and embarrassed, and his eyes met hers searchingly.

"Mrs. Kenway," he said, without any conventional preface, "I wish that I could have seen you last night."

A rush of colour overspread her face; but she did not answer.

"I have a great deal to say to you——" he began.

She moved to the door through which she had entered. "Come in here," she said. "There's a fire. It's cold in this room."

He followed her, and threw a swift comprehensive glance round. A look of apprehension came over his face. The place was all a litter of papers—packets tied up and documents of different kinds. The drawers of the writing-table stood open and were in confusion, and shreds of torn letters over-filled and lay round the waste-paper basket. Kooràli moved some books from a chair and motioned to it.

He did not seat himself. As she stood by the mantel-piece he made an abrupt movement towards her, as if he would have entreated or implored her to desist from some course to which he guessed. But he restrained himself.

"Mrs. Kenway," he exclaimed, "what does it mean? You are making preparations for a journey at once?"

"I am going away," she answered quietly.

Arden gazed at her in pain and bewilderment. "What does it all mean?" he repeated, and gave a strange little laugh. "Every one is going away. Lady Betty has left her husband. I met Morse last night. He, too, said that he was going away. And you——" He advanced a step, and his eyes rested full upon her with such anxious questioning in them that her own drooped. "You haven't got any rash project in your mind? I know that you and your husband intended to leave England in a few weeks. It's only that something has occurred to hasten your voyage to Farnesia, and you are getting ready. That is all?"

"No," she replied, still composedly. "It isn't that, Lord Arden. I'm not going to Farnesia with my husband. We are going to Australia—my boys and I."

There was still alarm and perplexity on Arden's face. "And Morse?" he asked involuntarily. "Where is Morse going?" Then, a moment later, he hated himself for having said the words and for the implication they conveyed. Kooràli became as pale as death. She knew that Arden had discovered her secret. She understood now his letter—his strange manner. For a moment he thought she was going to faint. The emotion she showed deepened his almost frenzied anxiety. He dreaded the worst. And yet something told him that, at whatever cost, she would be true to her womanhood. It was a relief when she raised her head with a quick proud gesture that he knew. Her face was less ashen now; but the strained look about her mouth told him how hard it was for her to keep the muscles in check, and her eyes were bright with tears as she turned them to his and then averted them.

"I don't know where Mr. Morse is going," she said, bringing out her words with difficulty. "I hope—I believe that he will stay in England, and show the people that he is not to be crushed by calumny. It would seem cowardly in him to go away. It would be wrong; and if he can get to feel that, he will never do what is wrong. Oh, Lord Arden, his friends ought to urge this upon him!" Her voice faltered. "They ought to point out to him what madness it would be to throw away his career in a moment of anger and disgust."

"You are right," said Arden. "He is a statesman, with a duty to his country. Whatever his theories may be—and they are not mine—he is a far-seeing, noble-minded man, and he has England's greatness at heart. I did not do him justice before the test of the elections came. I believed him to be merely an ambitious politician eager for power. I do him better justice now."

Kooràli's eyes glistened. "You will tell him this," she said, and raised her hands in a gesture of appeal. "The storm will blow over. In a little while he may be contented again—it will take a little while." She seemed to be speaking less to her companion than in argument with herself. "His career, his ambition, his cause, will fill his life and make up to him for everything. And his wife will go back to him. He mustn't be hard on her. Oh, Lord Arden, you will speak to him. You will tell him all this!"

There was genuine pity in Lord Arden's face. "And you yourself, Mrs. Kenway? You, too, will speak to him?"

"No," she answered, with a strange solemnity in her tone; "I shall not see him again."

She turned her head, and, covering her face with her hands, leaned her forehead against the mantel-piece. The strain was relaxed at last. He saw that her frame shook with suppressed sobs. His heart ached in compassion for her, and yet he could not by word or gesture attempt to comfort her.

He moved away, and stood with his back to her, looking fixedly at the stained-glass window above her writing-table. For years and years Arden remembered the particular colouring and design of that

window, and he associated it always with one of the most sorrowful moments he had ever known. Presently the convulsive sounds ceased, and he knew she was calm again. When he went to her once more she had raised her face. It was wan and piteous, but except for a slight trembling she gave no sign of agitation.

"I am ashamed of myself for breaking down," she said, with a pathetic smile. "But I've had a great deal to try me the last two days. I didn't sleep much last night; and I think I'm worn out."

He took her hand as if she had been a child, and placed her in a big arm-chair close to the fire, seating himself near her.

"I don't wonder that you are worn out," he said. "You are ill. You have looked ill for a long time; and yesterday upset you. It upset every one. We won't talk of Morse now, Mrs. Kenway, but about you. You may depend upon me to do my best—my very best—to bring his wife back to him, and to keep him true to his country and to his real self. That is what you and I—what all his real friends must wish. I think that I can understand your feeling." He waited for a few moments, not looking at her.

Kooràli leaned back in her chair and wearily closed her eyes. His words brought a sense of relief, but one of pain and strangeness too. It was as though she saw everything slipping away from her.

Arden went on. "I want to know about yourself. I am sure that you are in trouble—trouble of some definite kind that perhaps I can help you in. Mrs. Kenway, don't you remember our talk at the Priory, and your promise that if you ever needed a friend's help you'd let me give it? You said then that the time wasn't likely to come; but I felt somehow that it would. And, though I'm sorry to find my presentiment verified, still I am glad to be here now. I asked you to let me call this morning because I had a kind of instinct that you wanted somebody. Will you trust me?"

Kooràli leaned forward and looked at him earnestly, her arms clasping her knees in that childlike attitude of hers.

"I will; I will, indeed!" she said brokenly. "I think you can help me. I am in great trouble, and I have no relations and no friends—except Zen. I can't write to Zen because of Eustace. I dare not run any risk of my husband finding out where I have taken my boys, till we have gone quite away. He would try to get them from me. But you will go to Zen, Lord Arden, and tell her; and she will come to me. I can trust Zen. I know she will gladly help me; and she is the only person I could take help from—of that kind."

Lord Arden understood her meaning. He dreaded to say a word which could wound her sensitive pride. "I am certain you may rely on Mrs. Eustace's good heart," he said warmly. "I will gladly go to her and explain everything. But, Mrs. Kenway, I don't know yet what has happened. I can only guess." He hesitated a little, then he saw the faint colour rising to her cheeks, and went on hurriedly, "You have not been happy with your husband. There has been a

disagreement; and you want to go back to your own people and take your children."

"Yes," she answered simply. "I'm going away. My marriage has been a terrible mistake. It's all ended now. We have both agreed that it is best so. We can never come together again—never!"

"But," he said, hesitating again, "if you have agreed, there might be some settlement—some arrangement. And the children?"

"Oh," she cried passionately, "don't you see? We can't live together again—he does not wish it. But he wants to punish me by separating me from my children."

"Is there no alternative?" he urged. "Your friends—your family might mediate."

She shook her head. "It's no use. I've thought it all out. There's nothing for me to do but to go back to Australia. I must leave this house at once—this very day. I must hide myself somewhere till the steamer starts. He doesn't think that I will take the boys, because I have no money. But Zen will give me some, and I shall be free." The yearning of an imprisoned soul was in Koorâli's tone. Arden was inexpressibly touched. "I can't give up my children," she went on, with gathering agitation. "No one could have the heart to tell me that it would be right. No one could tell me that I must go on suffering—go on living a life of degradation. I have borne so much; I can bear no more." She covered her face with her hands for a moment, then looked at him again. "I am not altogether selfish," she added more quietly. "It is for their sake as well as for my own. I should deserve punishment if I allowed my boys to grow up into men like their father."

Her lips tightened resolutely. Her face had lost its expression of pathos and helplessness. It was hard and cold; the face of a woman who has endured the utmost possible to her and will bend no more. He saw that she had taken the law into her own hands, and that whatever her case might be she would admit no argument upon it. It was his assumption that she was justified in the course she meant to take. He had no good opinion of Crichton Kenway, whose character, he had learned by one of those accidents which reveal something of a man's private life, did not bear scrutiny. He had watched Koorâli in her relations with her husband, and had admired her loyalty and her patience. He knew that only strong provocation could have forced from her the words she had just uttered. He felt that he had no right to ask any questions. There was a short silence. Koorâli broke it.

"I see that you doubt whether I am acting wisely," she said quietly. "You do not know everything; and I cannot tell you. I can never tell any one. If you knew, you would see that there is no other life I can lead. I am not grasping happiness at the cost of duty. There can be no happiness for me in this world except what comes through my children. I have a right to take them till they are old enough to

be brought up at school. Then, perhaps, something may be arranged; but not now. I don't claim more than my right. I don't forget what they owe to their father, or what I owe to my husband."

She spoke rapidly, with undertoned decision, and her eyes met his fixedly. He seemed lost in thought. Suddenly he got up and stood over her.

"How soon do you want to leave this house?" he asked.

"To-day! to-day! As soon as ever I can. I *must* get out of this place before many hours; before an hour, if I can."

"But, tell me; why are you in such haste? Can't you wait even until to-morrow?"

"Oh, to-morrow, to-morrow!" she exclaimed passionately; "there is no to-morrow for me—I must go at once. Now, now, now!"

"Are you afraid," he asked, "that your husband will come back and do you some harm?"

"No, no; he will not come. I was not thinking of him. Oh!" A cry broke from her, a cry of alarm lest she should have betrayed her secret. She had betrayed it. Arden knew now why she was eager to go at once. He, too, felt that she must go; that she must not stay one hour longer in that house.

"If you knew all," she cried impatiently, "you would know that I am doing right, and that there is nothing else for me to do."

"I am sure you are doing right," Arden said; "I am sure there is nothing else for you to do, since you tell me so."

"Oh, thank you, ever so much!" She could have kissed his hand in the fervour of her gratefulness to him for his belief in her. So narrow is the horizon of humanity's mood of joy or sorrow, that the rush of a sensation almost like delight filled and flooded her soul at the mere thought that in that hour of trial she was not utterly alone; that the sympathy and the trust of one generous heart sustained her.

"I understand enough," Arden said. "There's no need for me to tell you that I feel for you deeply. I was not thinking of whether you are right or wrong. I take your word. I'm only concerned as to how I can best help you, and a plan has occurred to me. You are right; you must leave at once. Have you any idea when the Australian steamer starts?"

"Yes. Next Tuesday, I think—the 22nd. I thought," she added, after a moment's pause, "that I could find some lodging where no one would think of looking for me."

"Oh no," he exclaimed, "that wouldn't do. You must not hide yourself in that sort of way. There must be no suggestion that you are leaving England under a cloud. Don't you see," he went on with gentle imperiousness, for she had looked up at him in a pained, wondering way, "that you are a woman who has attracted a great deal of attention, Mrs. Kenway, and society won't be content to let you slip out of its sight unnoticed? It is very important that people should not be allowed a chance of saying ill-natured things."

"Yes—I know," she said; "but I can't help it, and I mustn't

mind. I am leaving my husband, and of course——" She broke off abruptly.

"I want you to come to my father's, and stay there with your boys till you sail. I will bring your sister-in-law to you."

Kooràli started and shrank back. "Lord Forrest. Oh no! I couldn't. What would he think?"

"Nothing except what is kind and chivalrous. It would be a delight to him to be of service to you, Mrs. Kenway. He has the greatest liking and admiration for you. You would not be safe at your sister-in-law's. I mean that your husband—or—or—any one who wanted to find you would naturally look for you there; and besides, society doesn't know very much about Mrs. Eustace Kenway. No; you must think of your children and your father and your friends; and you must leave this country in such a way that spite itself could find nothing to say against you. Now, Mrs. Kenway, my father has odd, eccentric ways, and he does not fall in with the new times or with society; but I am proud to be able to say that what you do with his sanction and under the shelter of his authority and his care will be held by society to be well done. No one living will suspect him of countenancing a wrong thing or helping man or woman who did not deserve the help of every gentleman and every Christian. Come, you see that I am right."

She put out her hand in silent gratitude. He took it in his, raised it chivalrously to his lips, and then only said, "Come, let us make our arrangements."

She felt that he was right. He had removed the one difficulty out of her path. She would be safe in every way under Lord Forrest's roof until she could sail with her boys. There was a streak of melancholy humour in the thought which came into her mind that Crichton Kenway might be trusted not to say a word in disapproval of any arrangement which was sanctioned by Lord Forrest; indeed, would probably feel rather proud that his wife had found shelter even from him under the roof of this grand old Jacobite peer. She felt safe now. She knew that she could save herself and Morse.

"You would like to be alone now for a little?" Arden said, after they had settled about her going to his father's house.

"Yes," she said; "I should like to be alone for a little—just a little."

She had still something to do. Perhaps Arden could have guessed what it was.

Kooràli's arrangements were made, her trunks were packed, her children, wondering where they were to be taken, were dressed and waiting in the nursery. There still remained some little time before the hour Arden had fixed for her to meet him at Forrest House. He had thought it wiser that he should not return for her, but that she should leave her husband's roof alone.

She had looked round the familiar rooms, and had wondered vaguely what Crichton would say and do when he came back and found them empty. She had said her farewell to them and to the associations of her married life. She had no lingering regrets, no sentimental desire

to dally with the situation. There was in her heart no feeling of tenderness towards her husband, of pity or personal sorrow. She had got beyond all that. The greater had swallowed up the less. Had she ever loved him there might have been room for wifely emotion. As it was, it seemed to her now that she had never been his wife at all in the real and noble sense of the word; and this severance of their lives was a saving operation in life-surgery rather than a catastrophe. She had passed beyond the limit of conventional feeling. She was experiencing an ordeal in which only the ruling instincts of her nature survived—duty and love.

There was one last task to be performed, the bitterest, the hardest. At five o'clock Morse would come. He, too, would find the house empty of her. She had not ventured to write to him at his own house, or his club, or to the House of Commons. She did not know what his movements might be, and feared lest her letter might not reach him. She went into her own little sitting-room, where she had received Arden, and set herself to write. But the pen dropped from her fingers. She leaned her elbows on the writing-table and buried her face in her hands. It was over—the bright dream which had first shone upon her girlhood, and which had come again shedding such radiance over her grey life. Before her all seemed black as night. She could imagine no future. The conflict she had gone through was as the wrench between body and soul. It was like death—now that the struggle was over. The soul had parted from the body; a corpse remained.

But the work she had yet to do must be done. She rallied all her strength of heart and mind, and she wrote a letter to Morse. She gave herself no further time to think; she wrote it at breathless speed, though the tears sometimes blinded her. Then she gave it to her maid and told her what to do.

At five o'clock Morse came to the deserted house. He asked for Mrs. Crichton Kenway, and was shown upstairs into her little sitting-room. He assumed that she was waiting for him. His heart was steel in its determination. Nothing on earth was worth much to him any more but only Kooràli. He closed his mind against all thought of what the world would say; all that was over. He had resisted every impulse to seek her love until fate threw them together; left them side by side and alone. They were as two who have been put ashore on some desert island in the midst of a vast ocean and left there alone. What were society's laws, conventionality's laws, for them? All he wanted now was to get out of England with her, caring little where they went, so that it was out of England. In the bitterness of his heart he hoped that he might never see England again—never, never again.

A woman's step was heard. Morse was standing with his back to the fireplace. He made a movement forward; but it was not Kooràli who came. It was Kooràli's maid.

"Please, sir," she said, "Mrs. Kenway has just gone out; but she asked me to give you this letter." The girl put a letter into Morse's

hand, busied herself a moment in brightening the light of the lamp, and then left him alone.

Morse looked at the letter. Too well already he knew what it would tell him. She was gone from him for ever! It did not need a prophetic soul to tell him that. With an iron composure he drew the lamp nearer to him, and he read Kooràli's letter.

"My Best, almost my Only Friend,

"You will not be angry with me for what I am doing—I know you will not, when you think it over. There is nothing else for me to do—and for you. I am going away; I am going back to my father in South Britain. I am going to begin life all over again—with what a difference!

"You will not try to see me again; I know you will not, since I ask you. It would not be possible for us to meet again just now. I have thought that it would not be right to put you to the useless pain of seeing me—since we must separate; and so I have taken on me to decide for both.

"Think of yourself, my friend—of your career and your country. Ah! even if I could forget myself and my children and my God, I could not forget you! I could not forget what is due to you and your future and your fame. You will forgive your wife; it was only a moment's weakness. You must remember her associations and her bringing-up. She is not to be too much blamed; and, then, are we not all to be blamed?

"Perhaps, some time long distant now, when you are older, when I am old, you will come out to South Britain again and see the places you knew there and some of the friends. Perhaps we shall talk over all this, and then I shall be able to tell you all I feel, all I have felt, without fear or shame.

"I could keep writing on and on, but to what end? You know all that I could say. I pray for you; I hope for you. Good-bye!

"Kooràli."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I WILL ORDER MY HEART TO BEAR IT."

Dusk was gathering when Morse left Kooràli's house. It was a gloomy evening, and the sky was heavy with gathering snow. Here and there lamps twinkled, but the western horizon was red still, and the old grey church at the end of the street, its spire and battlements outlined in white, stood out venerable and solemn against dull copper-coloured clouds, and seemed to rebuke the fever and fret of human passion. Yesterday's snow lay yet on the ground, and hung on the trees, but its beauty was gone, its purity sullied.

Morse walked on like a man in a dream, his footsteps crunching the unswept snow with monotonous regularity. He found himself some-

how in the Green Park. For a while he was hardly conscious of his movements. He was making for his desolate home, but he scarce knew why he was going there, or, indeed, whither he was going.

Presently he got into the streets again. An old crossing-sweeper whom he knew touched his hat, looking as though he had something to say, and Morse, still in a dream, found himself stopping to speak to the man.

"Bad times these," Morse said mechanically, as he put a coin into the sweeper's hand, and then he corrected himself with a harsh little laugh. "Good for you, my friend, and more dirty weather coming. You should be thankful."

"Thank you, sir," said the man; and he looked at Morse with that odd, wistful, moralizing expression which may be noticed sometimes on the faces of those who have seen better days but are resigned to circumstances. "Life is as it comes, sir. It has its pains and pleasures, and a deal more pain than pleasure. But you're in the right. Thankfulness is the cheapest sauce for both."

"You've seen a good deal of life, and that's your conclusion?" said Morse.

"Yes, sir, close on sixty years, and thirty of them married years, that came to an end yesterday."

"What do you mean?" said Morse again with his harsh laugh. "Has your wife run away from you?"

"No, sir; she went straight all her life, and she brought me a family that's dead or gone crooked. And there was only us two left, and she died yesterday. We never had a quarrel all those thirty years, and that's more, sir, than most married couples could say—high or low."

The man turned abruptly away, and began to sweep vigorously.

"You're right, my friend," said Morse in a bitter tone. "That's more than many a married couple can say, even after ten years or less. You have had thirty—thirty years of confidence and affection. Well, as you say, thankfulness is the cheapest sauce for either pleasure or pain. I'm very sorry for you."

He put some more money into the man's hand, and passed quickly on, with the thought biting his heart that parting by death from some loved one is not the worst trial that can befall a human companionship. Then he seemed to lose self-consciousness again until he became aware that he was in his own study and that he had taken a volume off the table and was looking into it. It was a volume of Horace. He had opened it at the fifth satire of the second book, and his eyes rested on certain words—"Fortem hoc animum tolerare jubebo."

"I will order my stout heart to bear it." Such is the noble language in which Horace, not always one to appreciate high resolve, makes Ulysses answer to the question,—"What will you do should cruel misfortune blight your dearest hopes?" Will Morse now order his stout heart to bear the sudden blight that has come over his dearest hopes? Will he crush down his ardent longings; rouse himself from

his dream of perfect union in some far-off Eden, and seek consolation in all the cynical commonplaces which proclaim that there can be no abiding happiness, no enduring harmony of souls? Will he go back to his "world of men," determined to forget the woman he loved and for whom he would have given up all? A man of high purpose, who at least wishes always to do right, will stoutly bear such a blow. He will refuse to seek any relief from pain, and will go on as before with the business of his life, suffering indeed, but unsubdued; or else, admitting that he cannot quite endure it for the time, will seek distraction, perhaps in travel, with the sincere, strong wish to find healing of his wound and to come back and do his duty in his world of men. When the first shock and pain were over, Morse in his heart acknowledged that Kooràli had done right; acknowledged that her woman's nature had taught her a higher lesson of duty than he had learned in all his man's experience and from man's code of honour.

But he had been hit hard. When, standing in her room, he first read her letter, he flung out both arms like a man who had received a bullet in the chest. He had known what was coming; yes; but he felt the shock all the same; even as one who goes into a battle with full foreboding that he is to die there yet tosses up his arms convulsively when the bullet comes that kills him.

Now that first shock was over, and he was once more in his lonely room brooding over all that had passed. He had thrown himself upon the broad leather couch near the window, and was sitting, his elbows on the back of it, his chin upon his hands, his eyes aimlessly attracted by that painting of a desolate, snowy landscape that hung over the mantel-piece opposite. The light of a gas-jet fell on the picture and gave it a startling prominence. The long, straight, lonely road which cut it in two and stretched to the red horizon; the waste of untrodden snow on either side; the gnarled willows in the foreground; a solitary figure outlined against the sky; a certain weirdness and melancholy suggestiveness in the whole conception, simple as it was, all caught Morse's mood, and seemed to him typical of his own condition. It reminded him in some strange way of the wide stretch of meadow below the Grey Manor where he had walked with Kooràli. He imagined the meadows now, snow-covered, bleak; stricken, like his and her feeling for one another, which had then been so innocent of wrong, so tender, so sadly sweet. He thought of her bright, gentle ways that afternoon; of her girl-like pleasure in her reeds and flowers; of the light that had come into her face at the sight of him. He thought of her with her children; and into this recollection of her there stole a feeling of sanctity, and then a deep hopeless regret. Oh, what unfading happiness for both, had she been his wife, the mother of his children! How tenderly he would have guarded her against any shadow of pain. Into what fulness of beauty and perfume would her nature have blossomed under his loving care. While the good to himself—— Are not such women as Kooràli heaven-sent guides to lead men to noble things? And now he must never see her more. They must each go their way,

and nothing would remain for either but a seared memory. He must travel his road in loneliness, and she in worse than loneliness. Better they had never met. He had meant her so much good! He had brought her only sorrow!

A groan burst from him. He covered his face, and in the solitude of the room a great sob shook his strong frame. Soul and body seemed to spend themselves in the cry, "Kooràli! Kooràli!" To think of her cruelly treated, misprized, when to him she would have been the very light of life. God! it was maddening. Could there be any scheme of an overruling Providence in this phantasia of existence—this meaningless tangle of incongruities and contradictions? Either a set of devils had the management of affairs and were playing at an infernal game with human hearts for counters, or everything was chance, and love and belief and all the deeper emotions of humanity mere parts of the ghastly joke.

While he thus brooded, a hush seemed to fall upon him as though an invisible hand had been laid upon his shoulder or a presence in the room were in some way making itself felt. He looked up suddenly and wildly. All was as it had been. The light still shone brightly upon the picture, and on that lonely figure plodding on through the snow. Only the fire had gone down. He must have been sitting there a long time; he wondered mechanically how long, and got up and looked at the clock, though a moment later the hour had passed from his mind. He seated himself again, and, as he did so, said aloud, with a bitter hard laugh, "There's an end of it."

His own voice startled him. It was as if another voice had spoken. The hush deepened. Then there came upon him an experience not common with him. He became aware of the presence of that subtle and mysterious influence which even many a cold materialist must at some time have felt, the power without one's-self working not for good but for evil. Strange promptings rose in Morse's mind. It was as though they came not from the depths of his own nature, but were whispered to him from without. It was as though there were truth in the theory which he had sometimes slighted, that the human spirit must force its way through beings and powers of the unseen world, of which any hostile one may in moments of depression or mental sickness creep near and make its evil influence felt. A voice seemed to speak to him, and to argue with him.

"Why try to rally against this blow in the old way of stoics and philosophers and Christians?" the voice said to him. "Let it pass; it is nothing to a man of spirit. No woman is worth all this coil. She would have disappointed you, or you would have disappointed her. She would have grown tired of you, or you would have grown tired of her. See what has come of your marriage; where is your wife now? Women are only meant to be the amusements and the playthings of strong and sensible men. You are young enough yet; you have time for enjoyment and ambition; nothing else in life is worth thinking of. Ambition was your idol; make it your idol again. Go in for success;

become great in the way that other men become great. Is it not the height of folly and vain-glory to imagine that you are nobler, more disinterested than the politicians around you? You know that your belief in yourself is false. You know that egotism is the root of your patriotism. You know that your love for the people is only another name for love of power. You know that in your heart you are not really devoted to any public cause; this very day you would have flung up every cause, every public object, for the sake of a woman. Why sacrifice any more for what you are not devoted to in your heart? Why pretend to any regard for virtue and duty and all the rest of it? You are not virtuous; you are in love with another man's wife. You would have gone off with her, only she would not. Duty? you did not think much of your duty to your own wife—the wife of your youth. You are just as bad as other men. Don't be a hypocrite; go in for taking life as other men take it, and get all the enjoyment you can out of it. Go and see Lady Warriner to-morrow"—this was a pretty and clever woman who openly professed a great admiration for Morse, and had tried in vain to get up a flirtation with him—"she will amuse you; and you need not restrain yourself as long as nothing gets into the newspapers. When you are tired of her you can drop her and take up with some other woman. Go in for success in politics, and make yourself Prime Minister, never mind by what means, and have all the enjoyment you can meanwhile. The world that howls at you now will applaud you then; and, as for your conscience and your soul, see what you have done with them already! It is of no use trying to be any better than the rest of the world when you are not any better. Other men get power and pleasure by being bad; you are bad; you know it. Why not have the power and the pleasure too?" That subtlest, most demoralizing form of temptation to the really conscientious nature, the temptation to think that retrieval is hopeless, was rung with pitiless iteration into Morse's ear. "You have fallen; you cannot be again as you were; be content to be just as bad as others, since, after all, they are no worse than you!"

Every one is familar with the struggle that takes place within himself—the struggle of the two sides of the one nature; the deliberate weighing of right and wrong, of present gratification against after-penalty. But the temptation to Morse seemed to come distinctly from without. All the time he knew that his own soul held no such struggle as that now forced on him; he knew that the promptings he heard were not the promptings of even the worse part of his nature or any part of his nature. They came from without. That was as clear to him as any physical fact in the material world around him. Of course his nerves, his spirit, his senses, his heart, had been put to the severest strain by the events succeeding events of the last few days. The riots; the death of Masterson; the odious charges against himself; the scene in the House of Commons—only yesterday, and seeming already so far away; the desertion of Lady Betty, about the mitigating features of which he knew nothing as yet; his sudden, wild, despairing

effort to prevail on Kooràli to go away with him; the shock of her disappearance; the pathos of her letter;—all this was too much for even his strong frame and brave spirit to bear. He was in that condition of mind and body which blurs and confuses the distinction between the within and the without; between the real and the unreal; that condition to which, in the words of Schiller, the kingdom of the ghosts is so easily opened. Morse did not believe even then, even for the moment, that a voice was actually speaking to him as he stood in his lonely room; and yet the words seemed to sound in his ear as if they came straight from the lips of some tempter in bodily presence. Again and again the suggestions of evil poured in upon him, and all the time he kept saying to himself, "These promptings are not mine; they come from no part of my nature; they are foreign to me." No man was less open in his ordinary condition to the influences which make men credulous and supply the demands of the mesmerist and the sorcerer; and even now, even in his present condition, Morse tried to pull himself together and composedly examine into the real source of the appeal thus sounding in his ears. But the more resolutely he watched, the more coolly he listened, the more distinct came the promptings from without. "Enjoy life; live for power and pleasure. Your life, so far, has been a failure every way because you vainly fancied you were better than other men. Think nothing of any particular woman. Shame for a strong man to make himself the dependent of some one woman. Take women as they come; make playthings of them; treat them as other men do. If life must end in remorse, let it, at least, be lived out meanwhile in gratification of the only impulses that make it bearable. You have earned for yourself remorse in any case. Since you are to pay the forfeit, why not enjoy the game?"

Then, as one shakes himself free of a nightmare and breathes deeply and awakes, Morse got up suddenly, flung the mood and the temptation from him. "I will order my stout heart to bear it," he said to himself. "I would have committed a crime—yes; but she has saved me. I thank her, and I thank Heaven that made her. I will live as she would have me live. She shall see that I am not unworthy to be remembered by her."

He buried his head in his hands and tears came into his eyes. The tears softened, relieved, and made strong his heart.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ZEN COMES.

Kooràli and her children were met almost at the entrance to Forrest House by the old peer himself and a stately ancient dame, his housekeeper. He received Kooràli with a chivalrous courtesy, a protecting tenderness that in her forlorn and miserable state moved her nearly

to tears. Her nerves had been so cruelly wrung, she had felt so keenly the sting of her dependence when brought face to face with the position, and forced, now that the moment for action had come, to realize her utter helplessness without money and without relatives who would take her part against the world, that to find herself thus lifted into a secure refuge, befriended and honoured by one whose very name would be a shield against calumny, was relief so intense as to break down the grim composure which had sustained her in her hard resolve. A sob shook her voice when she tried to utter her thanks for Lord Forrest's greeting, in which he begged her to consider his house hers and to command his entire service. She could only look up at him with dimmed, frightened eyes and gratefully press the hand that had taken hers. She had the feeling of one in a dream when the massive doors closed behind her on the outer world. The square hall, lighted by stained glass windows emblazoned in armorial designs, the rich-hued tapestry, the strange carvings, the fifteenth-century cabinets, the Gubbio plaques and Palissy ware, the array of portraits that looked down from the walls like living people of a bygone time; even the stately old nobleman, with his white pointed beard, his deep-set dark eyes, his courtly bearing—all seemed part of her dream. The servants, grave and dignified, in harmony with their surroundings, stood back as the old man offered Kooràli his arm, and led her up the broad staircase, and along a corridor, to the suite of rooms which had been hastily prepared for her.

The boys were a little awed and frightened by the strangeness and solemnity of it all. Miles clung to his mother, gazing up at her with scared, wistful eyes; and Lance uttered a dismayed ejaculation as she moved away with her host. But there was something in Lord Arden's cheery hand-clasp, and he walked on and looked bravely round him at the paintings and the *bric-à-brac,* and asked no questions, like a well-mannered child.

The sitting-room into which Lord Forrest took Kooràli had, too, an old-world flavour of memories and associations. It put her in mind of one of the rooms she had seen in the Little Trianon, and there was a melancholy suggestion of something feminine in the decorations, which were after the style of the French Regency—in the faded blue satin hangings, and in the arrangement of the furniture.

The old man glanced round with the air of one to whom the place was unfamiliar, and in whom it had awakened tender and half-painful recollections.

"This was my daughter's room, Mrs. Kenway," he said, "and it is yours as long as you will honour my house by staying in it. You'll let me come and see you here sometimes, and you will pay me a visit by-and-by in my bookworm's corner? I am an old recluse, as you know, and I don't interfere much with Arden, who entertains his friends in his own fashion; but you are my friend and my guest as well as his, and I shall claim my rights over you."

He raised her hand to his lips as he had once before done, and was

taking his leave. Kooràli found words now. She clasped his hand in both of hers, and her pathetic eyes, wet with tears, met his.

"Oh, Lord Forrest!" she exclaimed, with a sob, "I don't know how to tell you what I feel. I don't know how to thank you for being so good to me. I had nobody. I was in trouble—" her voice broke for a second—"I did so want help—and you have helped me. And I have no claim on you—or anything. But I shall think of you and be grateful to you when I am far away. I shall never forget!"

Lord Forrest looked at her gravely and tenderly. "My dear," he said, "a man of my years and my ways, who has left himself so little chance of doing good to any one, finds a benefaction conferred on him by any one who wants a helping hand and allows his to be the hand." With these words he left her.

Presently a maid, who seemed already established as Kooràli's attendant, took the children away. The home-likeness deepened her sense of strangeness and desolation. She leaned back and drew a quick breath like a gasp of pain. A clock on the mantel-piece struck five. The knell—it was a knell to her—seemed a knife-thrust. She gave a start, and pressed her hand to her bosom, as women do when they suffer. Her soul was in her own little room at home—the home she had left for ever. It was with Morse. Ah! did she not know that he would be punctual to his tryst. It shared his anguish. He would read her letter. Why had she not written more tenderly? Why had she not poured forth all the yearning and the sorrow that were in her heart? Why had she not taken that poor comfort since she had so sternly denied to them both all other comfort?

Arden suddenly came in.

"Mrs. Kenway, I am going down to the Priory, and I shall bring your sister-in-law back with me to-morrow, I hope. My train leaves in half an hour."

Kooràli gazed at him in a bewildered way. She half rose. "You are going"—she said, in a strained voice, and added helplessly, "I don't know whether Zen is at the Priory."

"Yes, she is there," replied Arden. "I telegraphed to her and have received her answer. Tell me, is there anything special you wish me to say to her, or will you trust me to do what I think best, and to bring her in spite of any obstacle?"

Kooràli got up from her seat and stood before him, her hands clasped nervously. He saw that she was trembling with suppressed emotion.

"I don't know. I can think of nothing, except that I must leave England at once; there must be no delay. Zen will come to me. Oh yes, I know that she will come, and that she will help me to go away, and to take my children. And I can trust her not to betray me to my husband. Oh, Lord Arden, nothing must stop me—" she spoke in a passionate undertone—"I'm trusting everything to you and Zen; and my peace—the peace of others—more than you can ever know, depend on my going away quickly."

He took both her hands in his and pressed them, releasing them again in a moment.

"You shall go," he said firmly but soothingly; "and in peace and safety. Your steamer sails in three days' time; I have found this out for certain, and all shall be arranged as you wish. I pledge myself. And now, good-bye till to-morrow. I will bring Zen."

When he had gone the stately housekeeper herself brought Miles and Lance to their mother. She stayed a little while and talked about her master and his lonely life, about the dead girl who had long ago occupied these rooms which had been given to Kooràli, about the pleasure she felt in seeing a lady in the house, and one of whom Lord Forrest thought so much. No one, she said, ever stayed in Forrest House, except Lady Betty Morse, and she but once in many years. Perhaps Mrs. Kenway did not know that Lady Betty was a connection of the family, which had not altogether approved of her marriage with Mr. Morse. To be sure, that was not to be wondered at, seeing how things were, and that Lady Betty had, so to speak, been trained to love the Queen and royal family. Every one knew that Mr. Morse wanted to abolish monarchy and the House of Lords, and had secretly incited the rioters in the recent outrages. Had Mrs. Kenway seen the evening papers, which were full of such dreadful things about him? etc.

Later, Kooràli dined alone with Lord Forrest. He too spoke of Morse and Lady Betty, though in different fashion. He was deeply concerned at Lady Betty's attitude towards her husband. He had learned that she intended to leave town immediately with her father, and to stay at Lord Germilion's place in the country. "Poor pretty butterfly!" he said musingly. "The bright wings are not fitted for a rainy day. They can only flutter in the sunshine." Kooràli could not trust herself to speak of Lady Betty. She had a sensation of suffocation. She scarcely dared raise her eyes. She was glad when Lord Forrest went on to talk of the political situation. London, he said, was alive with rumours. There was one that the ambassador had been recalled from the capital of that State which was England's enemy, and that the Mediterranean squadron had received orders to move. The Ministers had been in close conclave that day. The papers were howling at Morse, calling upon him to defend himself, lamenting in terms, some ironical, and some sincere, the downfall of a statesman, the ruin of a career. "We are ruled by passion and panic," Lord Forrest said. "Mob law prevails in Downing Street as well as in Hyde Park. The dynasty of a revolution must do homage to revolt."

So the waking nightmare wore on only to repeat itself in her broken slumbers. All through her dreams she was with Morse and yet apart. His sorrowful eyes gazed at her through mist and gloom. In the distance she saw his face, stern and impassive no longer. She heard his voice as from afar, shaken in passionate pleading. She struggled to reach him, to touch his hand, to utter but one word of love and consolation. She could not speak. A force stronger than herself bore her away. The dumb yearning was agony. It was as though her very

being were rent. She awoke with a cry, awoke to silence and darkness and loneliness intense. She stretched out her arms wildly. Were these limbs flesh and blood, with power to move, a force in nature; and was this mighty love a mere exhalation, an unreality? Was there no life for it, and no immortality? Did this wondrous affinity of soul mean nothing? In the eternal code was there no law for spirit as for matter, which should command like to like in everlasting union? Was there no solution now or in the hereafter of the terrible enigma of love?

Zen looked shy and not altogether like herself when she was ushered into one of the great sombre rooms of Forrest House where Kooràli was sitting. Lord Arden had brought her almost to the door of the room, but he felt that his presence might then be an embarrassment to Kooràli, and he left Zen to go in alone.

The two women met in the middle of the room, and Kooràli was clasped in Zen's sturdy arms.

"Oh, Zen," Kooràli said, "I knew you would come. I knew that you'd stand by me and help me."

Zen released the fragile form, and, holding it at a little distance, gazed at Kooràli, her own brown eyes full of tears.

"Well, now," she said at last, in her spasmodic fashion, "I shouldn't have thought it wanted much knowing to make certain that I'd be a good pal to you, Kooràli. Didn't I always say that it was you and I against the Family? Of course I'll stand by you, dear; and, what is more, I have brought Eustace to stand by you too."

A blush came over Zen's face as she spoke, but Kooràli was too full of her own trouble to notice it.

"Eustace," she exclaimed, shrinking visibly. "Oh, Zen, I didn't want you to tell him where I was."

"I had to tell him," said Zen. She paused a moment. "Eustace and I have had a mutual explanation," she added solemnly; "ain't that the way to put it? But never mind about the explanation now; it will keep. You needn't be afraid. I will say for Eustace that he is not one to split on a bargain; and he and I have made a bargain." Zen paused again and blushed, with her grave yet somewhat embarrassed air.

"What sort of a bargain, Zen?" Kooràli asked nervously. She began to fear that she had been the cause of a quarrel between the two. Zen undeceived her.

"Never mind. We'll come to that presently. Anyhow, it has very little to do with you, and you're what we've got to think of now. Tell me all about it; you've quarrelled with Crichton, and you are revenging yourself upon him by running away and taking the children?"

"I'm going away, Zen; but it is not out of revenge. And Crichton does not care so much as I do about the children. He will not miss them—or me."

"I believe you there," said Zen. "He won't break his heart and cry his eyes out. And I suppose you have got as good a right to

them as he has. I don't think he'll try to get them back once he finds they are out of sight. If you want to get off in the dark, Kooràli, I'll manage it for you; but I'd like to know what you really are up to."

Zen seated herself in a decided manner in one of Lord Forrest's antique chairs, the arms of which penned in her abundant draperies, while the straight back threw out her feathered French bonnet into startling relief. A queer little smile flickered over Zen's face, which had hitherto been becomingly serious. "I think Lord Arden would say that I was tolerably incongruous here," she said parenthetically, her eyes roving round over the quaint carving and the tapestry upon the walls. "I'd clean up all that pretty quick, or I'd have it down and put up some nice smart plush. Come, Kooràli, what does it all mean, and why have you taken the bit between your teeth? He told me not to ask questions, and I won't. *I* shouldn't want to go with Crichton to Farnesia. I'd make myself scarce. Crichton is mean and he is a bully. But why don't you stop here, and let him be king of the Cannibal Islands all by himself? Why don't you stop and fight it out? I wouldn't go to Australia when I could have my fun in London. I wouldn't climb down if I were you. Eustace and I will stand by you; and as for the Family, why it will give them some occupation praying for the regeneration of your soul. Think of all the friends you've got here. There's Lord Forrest, the Morses, and—Kooràli, does Mr. Morse know what you mean to do?" Zen's brown eyes gazed at her sister-in-law with a suddenly puzzled expression in which there was a trace of alarm.

"Yes," replied Kooràli steadily, "he knows."

Zen did not speak for a moment or two. Kooràli could not bear her steady gaze for long, though she met it now without flinching. She kneeled down suddenly before Zen, and, taking Zen's hands in hers, said, without raising her eyes—

"It's no use trying to argue with me, Zen dear. My mind is made up. I don't mean to accuse Crichton—to you or other people. You must all think what you please; and if you blame me, perhaps I deserve it, though not as much as you fancy."

"I shall not let any one blame you," exclaimed Zen impetuously. "You may be sure of that. It would take nothing short of a miracle to convince me that you were in the wrong."

"I can't explain things to you, Zen. You must only believe that there is nothing else for me to do—nothing. I am very unhappy, and my life is broken. I want to go away with my children, who are all I have got in the world now, and be at peace for a little while. I mean to stay in Australia among my own people till the boys are older, and then something must be settled. I can't tell what. I am too miserable and perplexed to think; but I will try to do whatever is right and just for them. I will not let my boys' prospects be injured through me. You must just believe all this, Zen. I am going in secret, because if Crichton knew he would take the children from me

—not because he cares, but because he—" she stopped for an instant —"Never mind that—only, if Eustace betrays me—oh, Zen, he won't betray me?"

"No;" replied Zen sturdily. "I have squared Eustace. I left him in the hotel with a French novel, and he'll read that till I come back; and then, if I tell him, he'll go and take your passage and see about making you comfortable. That's part of the bargain. Oh, my dear, go on and say whatever it is a relief to you to have out. I won't ask any questions, and I'll forget it all again; but it must do you some good to know that you've got a sister who feels for you from the bottom of her heart."

Zen stooped forward, and, putting her arms round Kooràli's neck, laid her cheek against Kooràli's hair. The two women clung to each other, and tears fell from Koorali's eyes on Zen's costly velvet and fur.

"I never had a sister," said Kooràli. "It seems as if I had been alone all my life. I sent for you, Zen, because I knew your good heart, dear, and because I had no money and not a friend in the world I could ask to help me except you and Lord Arden. And I remembered what you had said to me, and Lord Arden went for you."

"You did me the best service one woman could do another," exclaimed Zen, with a passionate vehemence that made Kooràli loosen the arms which held her and gaze up at Zen with eyes gleaming through tears; but Zen tightened the embrace once more, and went on hurriedly, with her face against Koorali's. "Look here, I must tell you, even in the middle of your own trouble—I know it will please you. You have brought Eustace and me together—you and Lord Arden between you. He's a real good fellow, Kooràli—Lord Arden, I mean—and I liked him. I always thought that if there was a man on earth who could make me better, it was he; and so I hung on to him all the autumn, and we had no end of schemes for doing the people good. I didn't mean any nonsense, though I dare say I was foolish; and he was always as nice and as friendly and respectful as if I had been one of those old frumps of ancestresses in ruffs and farthingales hanging up in the hall here. Well, some nice, good-natured persons —and Crichton Kenway was one of them; so now you know one of the grudges *I've* got against him," added Zen savagely, straightening herself as she spoke—"went to Eustace in a mean, underhand way, and put nasty things into his head; and Eustace was too high and mighty to have it out fair and square, but started off to Paris in a huff. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's being treated as if I were an umbrella—put in the rack when not wanted, and only taken out on a rainy day," said Zen frankly. "After Eustace came back, we had a row—about nothing; we never got near the root of it all. I made sure that Eustace was sick of me and that he had come to the conclusion I was dear at the price. I felt like praying that I might be twenty-one in an hour, and have the right to pitch all my money into the sea. And, oh, Kooràli, I was wrong all the time. I hadn't been doing myself justice or Eustace either. When Lord

Arden telegraphed yesterday to ask if I could take him in, as he wanted to see me about something particular, and I answered back, 'Yes, of course,' Eustace was just starting off for a family shooting-party. I begged him not to disarrange his plans on my account, for I really preferred entertaining Lord Arden alone." Zen gave a queer little laugh, which had in it something like the sound of a sob. "I never saw Eustace so moved, Kooràli. He turned white with rage. He ordered the carriage round again, and he dropped his eye-glass and said that though I might choose to court ill-natured gossip, it was his duty as my husband to protect me against it. Well, then, I stormed and cried and he listened. I told him that I knew he didn't care for me, and that he had only married me for my money, when he was in love with that horrible woman in Florence. I told him all that my stepmother had said to me; and then he was awfully horrified, and we had *such* explanations. And somehow it came out that he really did care for me, but thought I didn't care any more for him; and I told him I thought he didn't care for me—and, anyhow, it's all right now, and I am so happy about myself and so miserable about you, that I don't quite know whether I am laughing or crying." Indeed, poor Zen was actually laughing and crying at once. "And it was all through you, Kooràli," she contrived to say between smile and sob, "that Eustace and I came together again. And he spoke out like a man about you, and said Kenway was a c-cad, don't you know, and that you oughtn't to live with him any more; and that he would stand by you against all the Family or fifty families combined. And when he said that, didn't I just give him a kiss? So it's all right now between us, anyhow."

Even in her trouble Kooràli felt her heart thrill with delight at the prospect of Zen's happiness; and she said so with an earnestness that was almost passionate.

"I don't know how it is, Kooràli," Zen said, "but no woman ever impressed me as you did from the first. I felt drawn to you that night of the family dinner in the most extraordinary way. You always made me feel that there is a lot more in life than one can see from the outside if one could only get at it. I saw directly that you weren't happy, and that Crichton was a brute to you, and was only running you in society to get what he could through you. I saw it all—everything—and I think I know why you are going away, and I honour you. Yes, I do." Zen's voice faltered. "Go, dear, and God bless you!"

Zen came again, later in the day, to report that Eustace had taken Kooràli's passage. She came many times during the following days, and was soon on quite friendly terms with the hall porter at Forrest House. She was not brought into contact with Lord Forrest, who in truth had a somewhat nervous dread of robust Mrs. Eustace Kenway. Arden managed the whole situation with commendable tact. He shielded Kooràli, encouraged Zen, and brought Eustace to the fore in a manner which was gratifying to every one. Zen took upon herself all

the arrangements that had to be made. Zen was nothing if she was not practical; and half her importance in life was gone when she was not buying things. So she bought a great many things. She provided outfits for the boys which would have carried them through a three years' cruise. She exhausted the resources of Cremer's in the purchase of toys, and she invested in a small library to cheer Kooràli's dull hours.

She did think of buying in Tottenham Court Road, and surreptitiously shipping furniture for Kooràli's home in Australia, but desisted on Eustace's representation that Kooràli would stay with her father, and that she could not keep her boys out there, and that some sort of reconciliation would probably be patched up when Crichton got tired of a bachelor life in Farnesia, though Eustace shrewdly opined that Crichton would be pleased enough for a year or two to pose as an injured and implacable husband, and enjoy his salary all to himself. Zen had a faint notion that Kooràli might be persuaded at some future day to come back and take up her abode at the Priory, but she said nothing about it now. She had the quickness to perceive that her cheerful energy and preoccupation with material ministrations were more soothing to Kooràli than any amount of spoken sympathy or high-minded sentiment, which was not much in Zen's line. As Zen expressed it, there was nothing to be done now but to let virtuous considerations slide, and trick Crichton and the Family.

Zen took a malicious pleasure in foiling Crichton. He came up to town on learning of his wife's flight, furious against her, and threatening to set the detectives on her track. It was then that Eustace played a stroke of diplomacy. He met Crichton raging and declaring that his name had been dragged in the mire, and that Kooràli had disgraced herself before London.

"I don't quite see what you are driving at," said Eustace, quietly fixing his eye-glass after he had let Crichton storm for a while. "I suppose you and your wife have had a difference of opinion. Zen and I often have differences of opinion. She runs away, or I run away, and we make them up again after a bit. You'll make yours up after a bit. As for dragging your name in the mud; why, it needn't be dragged. All that London thinks about your wife is that she must be a very charming and clever young woman to have got into the good graces of that exclusive old Jacobite, Lord Forrest. Ask Kitty Nevile-Beauchamp if she wouldn't give a year of her life to be invited to spend one hour at Forrest House, to cheer Lord Forrest in one of his fits of depression."

"Do you mean that Kooràli is staying with Lord Forrest?" gasped Crichton.

Eustace nodded imperturbably.

Crichton found his breath almost taken away. If he had not quarrelled with Kooràli, he, too, might have been at Forrest House.

"Have you seen her?" he asked in despair.

"Oh dear, no," replied Eustace, quite truthfully, for he had not then

seen Kooràli; "and I have not spoken to Lord Forrest either. Zen heard it from Arden. I don't think I'd send the detectives to Forrest House, Crichton, if I were you. The old Jacobite mightn't like it."

"Yes," said Crichton, and his brow was darkened, and Eustace felt, as he dropped his eye-glass, the incident being over, that Kooràli's wrongs were well-nigh avenged.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN THE AUSTRALIAN SUNSET.

It was Kooràli's last day in London. No line or message had come from Crichton. As a matter of fact, he had gone back to the Grey Manor to be present at a county function; and moreover, he was not particularly anxious to be seen in London while the papers were still full of the recent disclosures in the *Piccadilly Gazette*, and speculating as to their source. He was in a mood of sullen wrath against Kooràli; but he had all the instincts of a bully, and was less disposed to make himself actively disagreeable now that she was under the protection of powerful friends. It would not be pleasant to have any passage of arms with Lord Forrest and his son. He half hated and half admired Kooràli for taking up so unassailable a position. He did not for a moment believe that she really intended to give up England and the social advantages she had gained for the monotonous, uncongenial sort of life she must lead if she went out to her father. Besides, she had no money, and she must ere long be "starved out," as he phrased it. Crichton had a theory that everything must, sooner or later, be levelled down to the pecuniary basis. He did not suspect his brother and Zen. So he went down to Lyndfordshire in a fairly comfortable frame of mind, and was the guest of honour at a banquet given by the Liberals of Lyndchester, where he was presented with a silver salver in recognition of his services during the election, and a congratulatory address on his new appointment. He made a pretty little speech, with several touching allusions in it to his wife, and contrived to make it generally known that Mrs. Crichton Kenway was staying with Lord Forrest, and that with Lord Forrest an average viscountess ranked little higher than the wife of a provincial mayor.

But Kooràli was in the dark as to his movements and sentiments. When Eustace told her that her husband was aware of her whereabouts, an intense terror seized her. She scarcely dared venture beyond her room. She longed with feverish anxiety for the hour of departure. She implored Lord Arden to give instructions that if Crichton presented himself at Forrest House he should be denied admission. And yet, amid all her terror, she had a vague, trembling hope—or was it a deeper dread?—that he would write some word of kindness which, though it could alter nothing in their relations, might at least soften the memory of their last terrible interview. Her married life was

over. That had been said and done which was irrevocable. She had made her soul her judge and its own defender. No conventional sophistries would ever change her feeling of rebellion against the obligations imposed by a marriage such as hers—a union which was a very outrage on nature, a violation of things sacred.

But this man whom she loathed and despised, at the thought of whose kiss her flesh quivered in repulsion, was the father of her children. Her woman's heart writhed, and the iron in her melted. This bond was a fact as definite as that of her own existence. The yoke might be borne in revolt and antipathy, but it could not be wholly laid aside. There lay the cruel problem, the wrong not to be redressed since Nature herself inflicted it.

The afternoon was grey and cold. A fog creeping stealthily, enveloped the houses on the opposite side of the square. Koorâli was restless and excited. The world seemed slipping from her. On the morrow she would be on the sea, and everything would be left behind —her children only saved; gone all else. She thought of the man she loved, and for whom her heart ached in throbbing pain. And yet it bounded, too, with something of elation. A little while ago she had learned from Arden that the investigations taking place concerning the death of Masterson were already bringing to light the fact that Morse had again and again written to Masterson, warning him against any association with cosmopolitan and professional revolutionists from the Continent, and especially against the very men who were now believed to have been in the actual employment of England's foreign rival.

Now justice would be done to him—now that the rattle of the war drum was sounding; now when panic and passion had taken another phase; now when it might be too late to avert the disaster he had dreaded for his country; now when his wife had left him and his heart was desolate—now he might step on in his career and serve England.

A wild impulse came over Koorâli—perhaps one heaven-born. She had heard that on the morrow, Lady Betty, too, was going away—leaving London with her father. Did this mean that the breach between husband and wife was irreparable—that Morse must be always lonely, that he also must lose everything? She knew well that his proud spirit would not stoop to conciliatory overtures. Oh, that she—Koorâli—she who loved him, might go to Lady Betty, and plead with her as woman to woman, and implore her to return to her husband and give him her trust! Her resolution was quickly made. She took her courage between her hands. She would not wait to reflect and doubt and wonder as to her reception. What did it matter if Lady Betty repulsed her? What did anything matter which concerned herself alone? The thought of those two other lives was passionately present with her, and even deadened her own pain. She felt a fervid craving to do something—she scarcely knew what—that might bring together again the husband and wife who had once loved each other.

The very hopelessness of her own marriage, in which there had never been any sanctity, made the pity of this marred marriage, with all its elements of promise, seem the greater. The look in Lady Betty's eyes when they had met in the Ladies' Gallery, haunted her like a spectre of her own guilt. It was readily conceivable that Lady Betty had guessed the state of Morse's feelings, and that this consciousness, rather than divergence in politics, had been the mainspring of her refusal to stand by him in his trouble. Kooràli shivered in shame and remorse, that she should have brought pain to another woman. Her generous heart exaggerated the measure of blame, and found justification for Lady Betty.

With trembling hands she dressed herself in her outdoor things and went downstairs, where she asked for a cab. It was not a long drive to Lord Germilion's house. She sat quite still in the cab, with her hands clasped tightly together. She was buoyed up and stimulated by a strange excitement. Lady Betty was at home, but it was not certain if she would receive a visitor. Kooràli wrote a line on her card, "I am going away to-morrow. May I not see you to say good-bye?" After a little while the man came back, and she was taken to a small room where Lady Betty sat before the fire alone. As Kooràli entered, she rose, and the two women stood facing each other; both small and slender and young-looking—Kooràli, in her long winter cloak, her hands still nervously pressing each other, her face very pale, with an awed expression upon it, and her lips trembling; Lady Betty the more composed of the two in manner, but with a burning spot on each cheek, and a light, half resentful, half wondering, in her eyes. The emotion she was trying to conceal prevented the signs of trouble and anxiety which her face showed from being too noticeable. Nevertheless, Kooràli knew by instinct that Lady Betty had wept much and slept little during the past few days and nights.

Lady Betty received her visitor with conventional, almost too marked, politeness. She had the formal phrases ready. She offered tea, and drew forward a chair. There was a strained, false note in Lady Betty's voice that deepened Kooràli's sense of misery and helplessness. Involuntarily she undid her cloak and veil, with the instinct that makes for breaking down barriers. A wall of ice seemed raised between herself and Lady Betty. And yet Lady Betty was smiling in her pretty, well-bred way, and asking easy questions, as though she had no part in the tragedy to which Kooràli was so keenly alive.

"I had no idea you were going away so soon, Mrs. Kenway," Lady Betty said. "It is very kind of you to come and bid me good-bye; but I dare say that you will be tired of Farnesia before next season, and Mr. Kenway will get leave of absence. His friends mustn't let Lord Coulmont forget him. But you and he are not likely to be forgotten, even if, as the papers seem to say to-day, there is a great war to distract our thoughts."

Kooràli did not answer. Something seemed to be choking her.

Lady Betty had seen the papers then. A dumb indignation possessed Kooràli. Had this woman been great-souled, she would not play at unconsciousness. Lady Betty went on with forced ease.

"I am almost inclined to envy you when I think of the climate of Farnesia. It would be pleasant to find one's-self in a sunshiny land just now. My father is trying to persuade me to go with him to Nice. He always takes flight with the swallows, you know, and he is later than usual this year. There has been so much happening—I mean, the uncertainty about the war——"

Lady Betty paused, and gave a quick little sigh. Her face changed, and then became hard again. There was a moment's silence. Kooràli made an abrupt movement, bending forward and lifting her hand, as if she would sweep away flimsy pretences. Her sad eyes met Lady Betty's in a piercing earnestness that seemed to aim straight through the proud reserve in which Lady Betty had wrapped herself.

"Oh, Lady Betty!" she exclaimed with tremulous fervour. "You will not leave England—and your husband who needs you—not now; not at such a time. Oh, do not be angry with me. I shall never see you again, perhaps, and I must speak what is in my heart. I do not care about myself. What does it matter? But I know how hard trouble is to bear; and when it has come partly through one's own act—through a mistake. And then to see trouble and division between those who have loved each other—and who— People for whom one cares, whom one admires and honours; and not to try and help, even when it seems presumption——"

Kooràli's words came brokenly. She had lost sight of everything but the need, pressing more and more imperiously upon her, to turn the suffering outside herself into a corrective of her own pain, and to merge the sense of personal loss into sympathy for another's loss and suffering. She rose in her agitation.

Lady Betty, still seated, cast a swift, long look at her—a look in which doubt, resentment, and some softer, nobler emotion struggled. "You speak of my husband and of me?" she said in darting accents that stung Kooràli like the blows of a lash. "Who has told you that there is division between us? Was it he who told you?"

She got up and stood before Kooràli. All her calmness, her affectation of indifference, had gone. She was more deeply moved than Kooràli herself. Her breast heaved. The passion and jealous anger flamed forth in her eyes. Their steady gaze was scorching.

"Who told you?" she repeated. "Was it my husband who went to you and told you that I had left him to stand alone?"

The blood leaped up and suffused Kooràli's face, dying down again almost as quickly. This was the moment of which she had had the secret dread present with her all through her rash impulse. If Lady Betty accused her! She felt like one guilty, arraigned before her victim. There was silence for a minute between the two women. Kooràli's paleness had become deathlike. She stood quite speechless and still. She would have given her life at that moment to be able to

answer that she had not seen Morse. But she would tell no lies. She had left deceit for ever behind her, and so she remained dumb.

Kooràli's strange quietude, her pallor, an unconscious dignity and pathos which her face wore in all its hard misery, impressed Lady Betty as no words could have done. Kooràli's aspect was a rebuke for her own want of self-control. She had betrayed herself. She had shown that she was jealous. A moment more, and she might have spoken words befitting a woman in a melodrama. What was the use of pride and reserve now? She had put herself into a false position. She, Lady Betty, who had always piqued herself upon her ready tact and her capacity for avoiding scenes.

She hated Kooràli then. Her beautiful palace of life seemed in ruins. She had the feeling that through this woman it had been shattered, and she was awakening to find herself in a world of new experiences, where her poor little individuality shrivelled into nothingness, and where everything was harsh and crude. And, amid all that was bewildering, she had a vague perception of something in Kooràli—some touch of nobility which she had never possessed.

Her nature was shaken to the core. She had lost all her bearings. Her cheeks reddened now. Passionate tears gathered in her eyes, and her lips quivered like those of a grief-stricken child. She turned away with a half-hysterical sob, and leaned her head against the high mantel-piece.

Kooràli came a little nearer to her. She put out her hands in a generous, tender impulse, and then let them fall again. Her heart yearned compassionately towards the woman who was Morse's wife, and who was so frail a thing. But she dared not touch Lady Betty's hand yet. Her emotion forced itself into her voice and into the words she began to speak, scarcely knowing what she said, full only of the overmastering desire to give back to Morse something of what he had lost.

"I knew that you were with Lord Germilion, and not in your own house; and Lord Forrest told me that you were leaving London. I came—it seemed so terrible that Mr. Morse should be alone—now, and that you should doubt or misunderstand him. It could not be more than a misunderstanding. He is so good, so noble. And his wife—oh, to lose the trust and love of one whom we love and to whom we are bound—" a sob checked Kooràli's utterance. She could only seize her thoughts brokenly. "Nothing could be so bad as that—to lose all we cared for most through a mistake. And then to feel, afterwards, that we had been mistaken, and had judged wrongly; and to know that but for that, others whom we loved might have been happier."

Lady Betty turned a little. Kooràli, watching her every movement with intense anxiety, fancied that a slightly changed expression had crept over her partly averted face; but she did not speak.

Kooràli went on, her voice vibrating with increasing agitation. "I know—I know what the misery is of a mistake in one's marriage—a

mistake from the beginning, when it was all done in blindness, and there was never any love or any trust. And to think the love should have been there at first, and the happiness, as in your marriage, and should be in danger now! Oh, it's like watching some one drown, and not putting out a hand. I couldn't—I couldn't go away—for ever, perhaps—and not come and speak."

Kooràli waited a moment; but still Lady Betty said nothing. She only looked up, and her eyes, full of tears, met Kooràli's eyes, wet too, in a wistful, pathetic glance. Then she drooped her head again. Kooràli put out her hand with a timid gesture, and Lady Betty's closed upon it. Kooràli spoke on—

"I may never see you or Mr. Morse any more. I'm going to Australia to-morrow—back to my father—I and my boys. I shall never come to England to lead the same life again. That's all ended. I've got nothing now but my children, and I want nothing else. I am not going to Farnesia with my husband. I'm leaving my husband because—" she faltered—"because our marriage was not like yours. We never loved each other. He wishes me to go. He has done what is base. I will not have my children grow up to be like him. I will not live a life of falsehood. But you—it is all different with you. I don't care about myself. I'm doing what I know to be the only thing I can or ought to do; and that is the end of it all. I'm thinking of you and of your husband. Your place is by his side—oh yes, yes, Lady Betty. He must have suffered so much since that day in the House. The world is doing him justice now, and you will do him justice, too?"

Kooràli broke down completely. The effort had been too great. She sobbed unrestrainedly. Involuntarily Lady Betty made a movement towards her, and the two women clung to each other for a minute, and kissed with a certain solemnity that was in itself a pledge. Kooràli knew now that she had conquered. There was no need for words. In such moments of crisis women's hearts speak. They were both weeping. Presently Lady Betty gently disengaged herself.

"He would think—if I wrote to him now," she said in a childlike way between her sobs, "he would think it was only because people thought well of him again. He would not know that I—" she hesitated, and the colour deepened in her face—"that I did not stand by him because——" She stopped altogether now, and instinctively drew back a little.

"Oh, tell him that you love him," said Kooràli in stifled tones of agony. It was the last effort of renunciation. She felt her strength going. "You are his wife. He is too generous to ask for more than that. What does anything matter if there is love?"

She could bear no more. A feeling of dizziness crept over her for a minute. She put out her hands blindly. "Good-bye," she said. Lady Betty took them in both hers. Kooràli heard her voice as if it were a voice in a dream.

"I know that you are a good woman," Lady Betty said. "Good-

bye; I shall never forget you. I thank you for coming here to-day. I hope you may be happy with your children."

There was an accent of tenderness and of sadness in the last words. They conveyed to Kooràli—her sensitive nerves strung to keen responsiveness—that she had one blessing which Lady Betty did not possess. She had her children. They kissed each other again silently; and then Kooràli went away.

That night Lady Betty wrote to her husband a letter full of simple, sweet penitence, making no excuse, but only asking to be forgiven. To do her justice, she had only allowed herself to be overcome by her father at a moment when she was under the influence of a strain upon her feelings which was already dragging her too far away from the even conditions of her life. In truth, she was longing to get back to her husband.

And Morse forgave her, knowing that he, too, needed forgiveness. She returned to her home, and very few knew anything about her ever having left it. Those few who did know or did guess were only too anxious to forget. Morse and she will live together—together and yet apart. Together and apart? Is not that the condition of many a marriage which yet the world calls well-made and happy? And Morse goes back to his world of men. He has ordered his heart to bear stoutly what has to be borne somehow. He does not forget; does not feel bound to forget. Sometimes perhaps Lady Betty finds in his manner to her an especial tenderness, a melancholy protecting sweetness which she has hardly known before, and which at once pleases and puzzles her. Is it a paradox to say that his pure strong love for Kooràli, whom he is never to see again, makes him more gentle than ever to his wife; more anxious to do her justice, to shelter her, to love her? No; it is no paradox—only the truth, the mere truth; and so —hallo!

* * * * * * *

The steamer in which Kooràli and her children had sailed was within the Great Barrier Reef. For several days the Australian coast had been in view, and all day and late into the night Kooràli had sat on deck watching the distant outlines of her native land.

And now the Cape of Muttabarra and the lighthouse were in sight. Kooràli was at the bulwarks with her boys beside her. She pointed out her old home to them with steady hand, and her voice did not falter as she told them how she had never been there since when little more than a child herself she had put forth in the pilot-boat to see the world. She explained to them the different routes to England, and how she and their father had gone by way of the south; and then she described the life on the station and the pilots. They speculated on the changes that might have occurred; and they wondered if Grandfather would be in the boat that was to take them off, and whether they would live altogether at Muttabarra, or if a change of Government would bring a Middlemist Ministry in again.

Kooràli often talked in this way to her boys. It was thus she schooled herself to face the new life and to look calmly back upon the old. Yet, though there was no falter in her voice as she answered their questions and replied to the captain when he came to tell her that they were about to signal the lighthouse, her smile and tone suggested the "ceaseless anguish of patience," the endurance of a sufferer in whom pain has passed its worst. She had wept so many tears that now the fountains of sorrow seemed to have run dry. Her life was broken, as she had said. It was as though she had touched death—the death of soul and affection—and had been allowed to live on, but was sent back to the world all chill and numbed. This could not always be so. Doubtless, after years, the severed flesh would join, and peace, perhaps even a kind of happiness, would be hers. Renewal is in the laws of Nature as well as change. The most limited future is full of possibilities, and God, when He withholds for a time, may generously add to a late-given gift the rich sense of duty fulfilled, or joy foregone for the sake of right. But to Kooràli now all was dark; no speck of light yet showed her the way out of the cavern of gloom and death.

The children left her, attracted by the hoisting of the flag, and she sat alone watching the familiar headland as it rose nearer and larger. She thought of that morning when in the brightness of dawn she had bidden it farewell. She could see in fancy the vanishing boat. She could see herself, the slim, bareheaded girl, so light-hearted, so full of hope and trust that it was pitiful to think of her now. The old phrase came back to her; the mimic title. Poor Little Queen! She had gone forth so gaily to take possession of her kingdom of happiness, and she had found, as many another sad woman has found, only a kingdom of sorrow.

Yet some good had come to her. She had seen a joy, although it was unattainable for her. Love had shone upon her as bright, though as far off, as light from a star. After all, is it not the greatest good—to gain the knowledge of love as an eternal reality, to be allowed to bear with one, as a possession for ever, one's ideal, an ideal which age cannot wither nor time disfigure nor life's storms wear away?

The summer day was closing in. All round, the sea lay still, and the red sunset was upon ocean and land. The steamer had slackened speed. Now the boys flew back to their mother's side. Kooràli took little Miles in her arms, and Lance raised himself on a bench, holding for support to her shoulder. A boat had put forth from the cape. Kooràli stood with her children clinging to her, and the light of the Australian sunset round her head.

THE END.

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